2021-12-01

Rewriting The Graduate Experience: A Study of The Writing Experiences of University of Texas at El Paso Graduate Students Across Disciplines

Jennifer L. Wilhite
University of Texas at El Paso

REWRITING THE GRADUATE EXPERIENCE:A STUDY OF THE WRITING EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO GRADUATE STUDENTS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

JENNIFER WILHITE

Doctoral Program in Rhetoric and Composition

APPROVED:

Lucía Durá, Ph.D., Chair

Brad Jacobson, Ph.D.

Shannon Connelly, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

To my students past, present, and future: Thank you for all you teach me.

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by

JENNIFER WILHITE, B.A., M.A

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2021

Acknowledgements

Dr. Lucía Durá: Thank you for persevering through almost six years of me and my academic adventures. You are truly an invaluable mentor who never emotes anything but confidence and wisdom and whose feedback is without fail precise, articulate, and positive (even when this writer deserved much less). Thank you for carrying me onward!

Dr. Brad Jacobson: Thank you for being a brilliant teacher, for teaching old dogs that digital thing, for your invaluable feedback, for practicing what you preach by pulling together a motley crew indeed for a book chapter written authentically from our experiences. Thank you for allowing us to feel like *real* scholars

Dr. Shannon Connelly: Thank you for allowing me to invade your monthly writing programs and toss wild ideas at the Graduate School. Thank you for your sweet smile, guiding hand, sharp mind, and diplomatic tongue. Thank you, for/to Sal, Jessie, and the rest of your minion army.

Dr. Corina Lerma: You have been my partner in suffering for nearly six years and the trenches have only served to increase my admiration for you and gratitude for your patience with me. Here's hoping we continue to suffer, and laugh, and drink gallons of coffee together.

Dr. Mary Compton: My Muse, my inspiration, my angel. You finished your dissertation while working full time and raising triplets -you made it look worth it. Thank you for your shoulder to cry on and for shouldering me through; thank you for not giving up on me when I really wanted to give up on myself.

David and Annabelle: Thank you for coaching me through some of the really bumpy parts and for celebrating with me when things went smoothly and encouraging my coffee habit.

James Towle: Thank you for teaching your students so well that I could be a mediocre teacher when they arrived in my room, for training my body while tending to my soul, and for being the best cheerleader a melt-down prone educator could have.

Charlene Thomasson: Thank you for years of encouragement, of accountability, of poolside chats, of never-long-enough telephone conversations, and for adventures into places unknown, both physical and emotional.

Family is vital to any success, so thank you Rob, Maggie, Kevin, Lauren, and Rick: my family of choice who celebrated with me when I succeeded and cried with me when I failed, but never failed to drag me back to my feet again.

I would be remiss indeed to not thank my parents: Earl and Karen who encourage me even when they know I have no idea what I am doing. Thank you to my sisters and brothers (Michael, Sarah, Cameron, Jo, and Mindy) who are all smarter and better looking than I am but let me hang with them anyway.

Michael Wilhite: Thank you for being you and for forgiving me. I love you always.

Abstract

Graduate writing can manifest as a barrier to successful and timely degree completion as writing is the primary modality in which graduate programs use to evaluate depth of learning and quality of knowledge created. Native language status, inexperience with advanced academic genres, time away from the academy, and socialization struggles are factors that can aggravate writing challenges. The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the graduate writing experiences of twelve women returning to the academy. The study asks if writing manifests as a barrier to completing their graduate programs, ascertains what kinds of graduate-level writing supports they find most helpful/least helpful, and then suggests steps UTEP, and potentially other institutions could take to design writing initiatives that target the specific needs of this demographic. The dissertation combines action research to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), and Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) into a participant-centered methodology. Findings reveal the specific, daunting academic challenges that women graduate students with complex and competing activity systems face as well as the affordances and resources that they pull together through peers and mentors to accomplish their writing projects. This study also describes in-depth a peer writing coach model that developed between the researcher and participants. The peer coaching model proved to be effective in supporting women graduate writers and can be adapted at UTEP and in other higher education settings. Other suggestions for writing tools that emerged from this research include self-advocacy education, providing writing class courses that center individual projects, graduate student peer support, and program collaborations.

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Chapter 1

Writing the Graduate into the Expert

Writing at any academic level can be daunting; at the graduate level, writing can make or break a career. Typically, graduate students have successfully completed an undergraduate degree and are seeking a masters or doctoral degree. Admission into graduate school usually requires significant accomplishment at the undergraduate level and quantifiable potential to complete challenging graduate program requirements (Henderson & Cook, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Hjortshoj, 2010). Students accepted by departments to pursue advanced degrees are often assumed to be capable of higher-level learning because "most graduate programs have competitive entrance requirements" (Mosley, 2020, p.41). Graduate studies require students to deepen their content understanding by "[making]connections across courses and [pursuing] interests" (Fredrick et al., 2020, p. 143-44) and moving from student to expert status. People who apply and are "admitted to graduate study are among the highest achieving students in the academy" (Holmes et al., 2018, p. 65). Thus, while potentially new to advanced academics, graduate school students are not unskilled newcomers.

Undergraduate attrition rates have been studies and theorized for decades, but the studies following graduate students tend to be local, specific to departments and unpublished by universities (Jones 2018; Golde, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Bair & Haworth, 1999; Cooke, Sims, and Peyrefitte, 1995). Despite varying across fields and institutions, overall graduate school attritions rates in the U.S. are estimated to be around 40% with higher dropout rates in the humanities and social sciences and higher retention rates in lab sciences (Holmes et al., 2018; Caruth, 2015; Council of Graduate Schools, 2015; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Moxley, 2001; Bair & Haworth, 1999). Even students who persist into the later

phases of their programs are at risk of dropping out before completing their degrees (Wolfsberger, 2014). Many factors affect graduate attrition and retention rates and include but are not limited to

- the success or failure of microevents like publication attempts and milestone performances (Jones, 2018);
- feelings of isolation (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Jones, 2018; Tauber, 2016; Li, 2014; Maher, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Paré, 2014; Hjortshoj, 2010; Golde, 2005; Casanave, 2002; Bair and Haworth, 1999; Cooke, Sims, and Peyrefitte, 1995);
- economic and social costs (Wollast et al., 2018; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Russell, 2013; Casanave, 2010; Zelazek, 2011; Maher et al., 2006; Golde, 2005; Baker, 1998);
- length of time to complete the degree (Wollast et al., 2018; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Bair and Haworth, 1999; Baker, 1998);
- being academically unprepared (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Caplan, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Li, 2014; Golde, 2005; Blair & Haworth 1999);
- struggles with the dissertation/thesis process (Douglas, 2020; Li, 2014; Bair & Haworth, 1999);
- language and cultural struggles (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Li, 2014; Simpson et al., 2020; Biswas, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014; Micciche & Carr, 2011; Denny, 2005); and
- the relationship the student builds with their advisor (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Kim & Wolk, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Jones, 2018; Zelazek 2011; Cooke, Sims, and

Peyrefitte, 1995; Golde, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Bair & Haworth, 1999).

The struggles of graduate school are numerous and individual, but one element of graduate life that crosses disciplines is the mandate to write. Graduate coursework requires a substantial amount of writing from projects that are one to five pages, like research memos and lab reports to technical papers, to lengthy synthesis papers, analysis papers, reflection papers, IRBs, and other discipline affiliated projects which can range from 10 to 30+ pages; most graduate degrees terminate in a ponderous written product of often hundreds of pages. Some masters degrees and many PhD degrees also include professional publication requirements (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2014; Maher, 2014; Casanave, 2010; Hjortshoj, 2010; Aitchison, 2009; Casanave, 2002; Dissertation Consortium, 2001). LaFrance (2019) defines writing as "the vehicle of many work processes" and "a series of practices that allows for the coordination of activities in different settings, at different times, and through the work of different people" (p. 41). These practices and processes and coordinating involve not just a variety of collaborators, advisors, professors, and editors, but also a variety of field-specific genres that a graduate student may not have mastered as they begin their journey but are expected to use to present their content knowledge. While writing projects vary in genre across the different disciplines and departments, "writing is the dominant way in which knowledge is present and assessed" (Book-Gillies, Garcia, and Kim, 2020, p. 5). Not only is writing the primary assessment tool for course work but writing "gains more importance as students advance in their programs" (Colombo, 2011, p. 27) and written products that are gateways to degree progression become more complex. In academia, writing is the bridge between the knowledge the graduate student has created and their presentation of that knowledge. From computer science to composition, writing is the form of expression validated by the academy to substantiate knowledge, show learning, and evaluate understanding; thus, every graduate student must write. However, not all students enter graduate school prepared for their program's writing expectations.

University classes at any level do not often give specific instruction in writing (Douglas, 2020; Holmes et al, 2018; Biswas, 2017; Summers, 2016; Ondrusek, 2012; Micciche & Carr, 2011). The majority of undergraduates in any discipline will only take one or two semester-long freshman composition classes. At my institution, The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), those courses are taught through the First Year Composition program in the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and intend to help undergraduate students "acquire and develop the composing abilities they need to succeed in their academic careers, their future professions, their civic responsibilities, and their lives generally" (The University of Texas at El Paso English College of Liberal Arts, 2021). If an undergraduate student struggles with writing, they can seek assistance by consulting with their professors, hiring a tutor, visiting the University Writing Center (UWC), a disciplinary writing center (limited to certain disciplines), working with a self-made writing group, or finding another avenue of support. Graduate students also very often do not have any direct writing instruction included in their coursework (Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Colombo, 2011; Moxley, 2001). Some fields require a technical or professional writing class or provide seminars that help graduate students prepare for dissertations, theses, and publications, but there seem to be few consistent and effective supports that address gaps between undergraduate students' academic writing instruction and the expectations of higher-level writing. With the exception of programs that are few and far between, like the Rutgers University's graduate writing support programs, or professional development resources provided by institutions like the Consortium on Graduate Communication (Consortium on Graduate Communication, 2021), many graduate students feel they are left to figure it out for themselves or rely on a busy advisor to check their work and return it with

suggestions for corrections (Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Thesen, 2014; Maher, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Paré, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Hjortshoj, 2010; Casanave, 2002).

UTEP Graduate Demographics and Writing Support

A Research 1 or R1 designation for a university indicates not only high levels of research activity but also high quality of research (Wharton University of Pennsylvania, 2021). UTEP is unique in that it is currently one of only 16 U.S. R1 designated university that is also designated a as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) (The University of Texas at El Paso Campus Newsfeed, 2021). UTEP not only serves a large Hispanic and international population, but also a population that varies in age, experience, socioeconomics, and cultures. As of 2020, UTEP hosted over 3,700 graduate students, 57% of whom were women. Most graduate students are between the ages of 25-29; however, there is a substantial number of students in the 30+ categories, including 1,591 between the ages of 30-49 and 209 who are over 50 (Univstats, 2020).

As a woman well over 30, but not quite yet 49, I know that the experiences of older women returning to school are challenging because we come equipped with responsibilities that meet and exceed those of our more traditional peers. Statistically, women in my situation are less likely to graduate, and if we do graduate, it very often takes us years longer than our counterparts because our responsibilities take time and resources away from our educational goals (Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Wollast et al., 2018; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Russell, 2013; Woldfsberger, 2014; Casanave, 2002; Baker, 1998; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). Graduate writing is not easy; some graduate students' experiences and success rates could be improved with access to writing supports, or in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) terms, tools (Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Feryok 2012, Hashim & Jones, 2007; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Koschmann, 1998; Hold & Morris, 1993).

L2+ Adventures

Several of the participants in this study are fluent in more than two languages which both complicated their academic writing projects and enriched their contributions to the academy. Li's (2014) research finds that students who learn academic English as part of their educational journey can become more proficient than native learners because they receive intentional, direct, and guided instruction. Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) argues that labels that imply a linguistic limitation "are fraught with all kinds of complications for resident students" (p. 390) and their teachers. Language labels can often indicate a need for remediation whereas many of these polyglots' skills in language are augmented, not limited by their linguistic range. Their variety of languages contributes to their discipline because their language experience expands academic innovation and knowledge through metaphors, patterns of thought, and perspectives that widen the scope of their disciplines (Biswas, 2017; Li, 2014; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). English, for several participants in this study was a second language, or third and for two participants, English was their fourth language, and I would argue academic English was their fifth (I explain this in the next section). Thus, in this dissertation I expand the term L2 which is used to designate a student for whom academic English is not a first language but is the language in which their graduate studies must be read and written; L2 is limited because English might not be their second language or even third. I designate these remarkable and versatile students as L2+.

Graduate Students in Flux

Global economic demands have and continue to change the demographic of the graduate student to include increased populations of working class, international, underrepresented minorities, more female students, and combinations of the preceding (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Caplan, 2020; Douglas, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Jones et al., 2013; Russell, 2013; Ali

& Coate, 2012; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Kirsch, 1993). Graduate degrees are often the access points for socio-economic advancement and therefore more people and a wider variety of people "with respect to gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, family, and economic status" (Tauber, 2016, p. 640) are seeking graduate degrees and being admitted into competitive, evolving, and expanding programs. An expansion in graduate-level programs and an increasing diversity in graduate students necessitates a variety of supports that include early intervention, discipline-specific support, and focus on issues of language learners, international students, and students without deep academic traditions (Simpson et al. 2020; Tauber 2016; Thomas, Williams, and Case, 2014). First-generation college students going to graduate school must learn the language of academia, which is not just about ethnic or national differences, but is a language that is often unfamiliar, even foreign, to generationally blue-collar individuals or students without a long-standing tradition of advanced academics. The increasingly complex and varied graduate student body necessitates writing supports that are also varied, flexible, and responsive to those changing needs.

Rhetoric and Writing Studies

Thomas Hobbs said, "Rhetoric is power," (Abbott, 2014, p.388) because he knew that "rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said)" (Glenn, 1997, p. 1-2). This study is situated in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS), which includes studying writing, observing the processes that produce writing, examining the power structures that call writers to write, and scrutinizing the nature of the epistemological courts that mandate writing as the shibboleth that grants access to, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, academic collateral and power (Moore, 2008). Writing is how the academy evaluates learning, proves creation of knowledge, and determines academic merit. Studying the writing process of graduate

students as they work through course assignments, articles, proposals, practicums, theses, and dissertations falls under the purview of RWS because since the 1960s, the discipline has been producing substantive scholarship on the nature and pedagogy of writing in all of its genres. RWS informs other disciplines on how to teach students to communicate their ideas. To be "granted the authority to speak and to be heard" (The Dissertation Consortium, 2001, p. 452) graduate students must master the rhetorical genres and conventions of their field and show that mastery through their writing projects (Russell, 2013; Paré, 2010). Since most graduate degrees culminate in a written project (Hjortshoj, 2010), writing is instrumental in giving the majority of graduate students access to a professional status and the cultural capital of an advanced degree (Moore, 2008).

As pedagogy is an integral aspect of RWS, the discipline also has the potential - if not the ethical responsibility (Huckin et al., 2012) to investigate and hypothesize ways all graduate writers could be further supported on their academic adventures. No matter what the writer's field, "Rhetoric's focus on the capacity of language to persuade audiences, connect individuals, and affect the biophysical world can strengthen academic writing" (Druschke & McGreavy, 2016, p. 46) across disciplines.

Purpose of the Study

Over the past forty-odd years, I have taught and tutored thousands of students ranging from four-year-old toddlers just learning their ABCs to doctoral students wrestling with PhD dreams. My near-sixteen years of professional teaching experiences have been in public high schools where I teach ninth through twelve graders how to read and write at remedial to first year college levels. Curiously, even after they have left my classroom, my students continue to email me their writing, from college admissions essays to lab reports to theses, and ask for help in

making their work sound better, or flow better or to, please, check the grammar. In my five-plus years as a graduate student at UTEP, I have voluntarily tutored dozens of students from Computer Science to Math Education to Speech Pathology and what I discovered is that there are many highly accomplished, motivated, and intelligent academics across UTEP's "over 100 masters degree programs and certificates as well as 23 doctoral programs " (The University of Texas at El Paso Graduate School, 2021) who struggle, sometimes bitterly, with writing.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of graduate writers whose lives are complex, complicated, and extremely busy to see what challenges they face and how they face them and how UTEP might further support their work. Despite many years of teaching writing, a master's degree in RWS, and my years as a doctoral student in UTEP's RWS program, I too struggle with my graduate writing projects. Thus, I have insights into the challenges my peers across the discipline may also be experiencing and I began this dissertation process with the intent of studying graduate writers to design writing supports that could make the process less arduous.

Overview of the Study

After working with graduate students from diverse disciplines over a period of four years, I started to notice a pattern in those students who actively sought assistance. While I worked with a few students whose academic careers were not interrupted, most of the people I worked with were students who were returning to the academy after years working or raising families or other life goals. As I began to focus on this study, I found that most of those students were women. Intrigued, and realizing that this demographic included me, I set out to study the writing habits of women returning to graduate programs after years away from the university. I recruited the participants for this action research qualitative dissertation, guided by Feminist Standpoint Theories (FST) of inclusion, through UTEP Graduate School writing support programs. FST asks

researchers to look at the margins and action research asks for multiple perspectives (Waterman et al., 2001); thus, the participants in this study are twelve women who are returning to UTEP graduate programs after time away pursuing career or personal goals. Eight of those twelve participated in a loosely structured interview about their graduate writing experiences; four of those twelve invited me to join them as a writing coach and researcher as they worked on graduate writing projects. Their disciplines range from chemistry to history and their ages range from late thirties to late fifties. Each of my participants brings a unique perspective or standpoint about a shared experience (writing) and have what Jones et al. (2013) calls an outsider perspective. They are dedicated members of their discipline, but do not embody traditional demographics and often have marginalized positionalities. Because their positionalities include "intersecting oppressions" they can "view academe from an outsider's perspective" (Jones, 2013, p. 333) while participating from the inside. Many of the participants in this study are women of color, some are first generation graduate students, and all are older than traditional students whose academic trajectory was interrupted by personal and industry tangents.

Women (Back) in the Academy: Research Questions and Methodology

To better understand the experiences of these women returning to higher education, I focus the collection and analysis of data on the following research questions:

1. How do women returning to school experience writing in graduate programs? Does writing manifest as a barrier to expected completion of graduate programs for women who are returning to school after pursuing a career or personal path?
2. What kinds of graduate-level writing supports do women returning to UTEP find most helpful/least helpful, and why?

3. What steps can UTEP take to design writing initiatives that target the specific needs of women entering graduate programs after time pursuing industry and life goals?

To answer these questions, I used methodological framework combining action research, CHAT and FST. This framework informed my study design, data collection and analysis, and write up. Action research embraces both theory building and practical application by identifying a problem and seeking a solution through collaboration between researcher and participant (Acosta & Goltz, 2014; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Waterman et al., 2001). CHAT posits that human society consists of many inter and codependent activity systems that utilize tools to obtain outcomes (Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Feryok 2012, Hashim & Jones, 2007; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Koschmann, 1998; Hold & Morris, 1993). Exploring the lives of graduate writers in terms of CHAT "fosters a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the features which impact on the effectiveness of a learning situation" (Scanlon & Issroff, 2005, p. 438). CHAT terminology enables me to situate the relationships between the university, graduate students, mentors and advisors, Graduate School/other programs with writing supports, and the different writing supports found across campus. I also use CHAT as a framework to map the history and context of the activity systems of graduate students' experiences wherein they write (Lundell & Beach, 2003; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014). CHAT seeks to understand the cultural-historical factors that give birth to and sustain an activity system and FST asks that as many perspectives as possible be considered. FST also recognizes that writing supports must be made available to, but not forced on, all graduate students.

Methods

In this study there were a total of twelve participants. I used participant-selected pseudonyms to differentiate participants and protect their identity. All participants identified as women. Eight of the women participated as interview-only (Brisa Solaris, Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH), Muktaa, Maria Martinez, Catherine Acosta, Maria Joseph, Mena, and Yun Lin) and we enjoyed a loosely structured interview wherein I encourage them to speak freely about the good, bad, ugly, and sublime writing experiences they had and were having through their academic career. These women's graduate experiences ranged from a few semesters into their program to women polishing the last edits of their dissertation.

In addition to the interview-only participants, I worked closely on writing projects with four women, two in STEM (Violet UV and Jessica Watkins) and two in humanities (Nora DeJohn and Bernadette Volkov), for one (Bernadette Volkov and Violet UV) or two (Jessica Watkins and Nora DeJohn) semesters. I interviewed participants before we began working on their projects. After the intake interview, we met once a week to review their progress, talk about their work and set goals for the next meeting. I listened to them talk about their challenges and successes and observed their project progresses and how they coped with their writing demands. We also conducted an exit/reflective interview. Working with both groups of students allowed me to see first-hand the struggles that are inherent in graduate programs and those that are unique to my participants. I knew if various supports were effective by asking students what kinds and elements of writing supports (including but not limited to the support I provided) productively assist them in finishing their projects and degrees and by observing their progress based on their goals.

After conducting the interviews and working for one to two semesters on projects, I coded the interviews in CHAT terms to identify activity system components along with affordances and contradictions while also coding for answers to the project's research questions. After mapping and coding interviews and my notes from working with participants, I merged my data with the literature to identify writing supports UTEP has in place, supports graduate writers use productively, and supports UTEP could create or augment current programs to facilitate and support graduate writing.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 has presented an overview of the study's background which explores the challenges graduate students often face and situated the study in RWS as it addresses the writing processes, and the power structures graduate students navigate via writing. This chapter also gave an overview the study's purpose, theoretical framework, and methodology.

In Chapter 2, I present a literature review centering graduate school writing, its purpose and expectations, the gaps between ability and instruction, what supports have been and are in place and why supports are needed and the positionalities of the population whose perspective this study centers. The literature presented in this review informs much of the analysis of the study's findings in Chapter 4, the affordances of the peer coaching model in Chapter 5 and suggestions for writing tool development in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3 describes my theoretical framework and expands on the methodology. The chapter also describes in detail my approach, research questions, data collection, and analysis. It includes the limitations of the study as well as my positionality.

Chapter 4 presents research findings from participants' interviews and projects using an overlapping CHAT activity system model to better understand the complexity of participants'

activity systems, where contradictions may inhibit their progress and what affordances see them through challenges. I answer Research Questions One and Two through an in-depth analysis of one participant's case study augmented with other participants' related experiences.

In Chapter 5, I present an answer to Research Question Three through a description of the coaching model that emerged during this study. The chapter examines the affordances of the coaching model in addressing participants' writing challenges and creating tools with participants to address those challenges.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions of this study and makes suggestions UTEP could adopt to support graduate writers by combining the literature from Chapter 2 and the input from the study's participants and advocates for further research that centers the graduate writing experiences of students at risk of marginalization.

Chapter 2

Writing: The Graduate Gatekeeper

Writing is the modality the academy has chosen to quantify learning and qualify knowledge making. Not all disciplines offer classes or direct instruction in the genres and jargons (Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Hjortshoj, 2010); thus, graduates who have not had practice in writing for long periods of time and/or are learning new genres and new vocabulary may struggle with mandatory and gatekeeping writing projects (Douglas, 2020; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). This chapter explores why the academy centers writing as the modality to express learning and present created knowledge. It then explores the role of writing in establishing status as a professional. The chapter then reviews the literature concerning graduate student struggles and how writing can both cause and complicate their challenges.

Why does the Academy Center Writing?

We are exceeded by what we create – Yrjö Engeström (2005)

From the STEM to social sciences and humanities' graduate programs, writing is used to encourage authentic and deep learning. Writing is a process that utilizes language not just to report information, but it is also a medium that "actually encourages and enhances thought" (Paré, 2014, p. 19). When students use writing to explore, examine, discover, speculate, reflect, figure out, and play with concepts, they are using writing as a learning tool; thus, writing is "a means of engaging students with the problems and methods of a discipline" (Russell, 2013, p. 164) and the means by which "they *make* meaning" (Paré, 2010, p. 32). Complex graduate genres give students high-stakes, but low(er)-risk, often supported, spaces to practice for their future professions and learn theoretical approaches central and fringe to their disciplines (Paré, 2014, 2010; Russell, 2013). These challenging genres show a student's progress, or lack thereof, as they move through their

studies. Cultural Historical Activity theorist Yjrö Engeström (2005) saw educational development moving "along a vertical dimension, from immaturity and incompetence toward maturity and competency" (p. 43) and as graduate students master the various composition genres of their field, their progress is "monitored and measured" (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b, p. 4) and either continued or paused for remediation or rethinking. Writing is evidence of a student's intellectual preparation and maturation and thus the way into, though, and out of the academy.

Thinking Made Tangible

"Writing is," according to John Gage (1986) "thinking made tangible" (p. 24) and thus able to "be examined because it is on the page and not in the head, invisible, floating around" (p. 24). From kindergarten to doctorate, academic assessments take many forms; however, at the graduate level, assessments center writing (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Kim, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Brook-Gillies, Garcia, and Kim 2020; LaFrance, 2019; Biswas, 2017; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Russell, 2013; Bair & Mader, 2013; The Dissertation Consortium, 2001; Rose & McClafferty, 2001; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Kirsch, 1993). It is through writing that students become experts in "questioning and understanding just what it is they want to communicate" and their writing is "where scholarly identity is formed and displayed" (Rose & McClafferty, 2001, p. 31, 30). In academia, writing is the bridge between the knowledge the graduate student has obtained and created to the presentation of that knowledge (Adams et al., 2020). From computer science to composition, "writing is the way in which knowledge is presented and assessed" (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020, p. 5) and thus validated by the academy before degrees are bestowed.

Writing the Student into the Role of Expert

The relationships between writing and the work of graduate students are a major part of professionalization because writing is how graduate students develop an authoritative voice and scholarly identity to move from being a student to becoming a recognized expert in their field. During their years of study, graduate students are "neither established faculty nor novice undergraduates" (Douglas, 2020, p. 71). They move in the space between expert and apprentice (Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; The Dissertation Consortium, 2001; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000) and therefore are in a position where they must prove they are scholars by learning how to write for and then producing scholarly texts in salient conversations with the authoritative voices in their field. Graduate students achieve academic validation by learning to write and publish in the genres of the discourse of their field, thus, move from being consumers of knowledge to contributors of knowledge to their field (Douglas, 2020; Kim, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Brook-Gillies, Garcia, and Kim 2020; LaFrance, 2019; Biswas, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Paré, 2010; Kamler, 2010; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Kirsch, 1993).

One of the challenges of the graduate student is gaining admittance to their field and being heard as an expert. Writing for the field is how academics develop their professional identity. The texts an individual produces present their theoretical approaches and is how they embody or question their field's "traditions, practices, and values" (Casanave, 2002, p. 23) and thus craft their academic identity in opposition or alignment with established experts (Aitchison, 2014; Paré, 2014, 2010). To gain legitimacy, scholars must not only situate themselves through alliances, but by bringing new ideas to and filling in scholarship gaps in the important conversations of their discipline. Graduate students and expert scholars present their knowledge claims via texts

designated appropriate and viable by their field's traditions and expectations (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2014). As they make new knowledge offerings and those texts are accepted or rejected – published or punished- the academic begins to craft their identity as an expert or professional (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Ings, 2014; Maher, 2014; Russell, 2013; Paré, 2010; Kamler, 2010; Kirsch, 1993). It is then their publicly available texts, their published writing, that legitimizes a scholar's expert identity and propels the successful writer into their academic community as someone who speaks with authority (Casanave, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Paré, 2014; Li, 2014; Russell, 2013; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Paré, 2010; Kamler, 2010; Kirsch, 1993). The authority created by their published and cited texts gives academics greater access to professional opportunities. In professorships and other knowledge-based careers "where the primary product is making and distributions of symbols" or texts, "then the activity system is centrally organized around written documents" (Bazerman, 2004, p. 319). Those who have publications or a thesis or dissertation that gives them authority are more likely to be further published and cited and gain employment; thus, the university, a preparatory training ground, centers writing to give graduate students opportunities to practice being professionals as they prepare to be professionals (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2010; Bazerman, 2004).

Graduate Struggles

The journeys through masters and doctoral programs are arduous can become all encompassing (Ali & Coate, 2012), and sometimes it is hard to tell if a student is making progress because the skills needed to navigate the myriad graduate demands take time to practice, develop, and manifest (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). Other struggles beset graduate students, including access to funding, as lack of funding is cited as the number one reason

doctoral students leave their programs without degrees (Wollast et al., 2018; Baker, 1998). In addition to financial hardships, negotiating "multiple networks of activity simultaneously-university, department, discipline, committees, job market, family" (Russell, 2013, p. 171) while learning advanced content, writing in specific genres, trying to establish a professional identity through publications, all while preparing to or looking for employment can be overwhelming (Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Holmes et al., 2018; Pinker, 2014; Ondrusek, 2012; Casanave, 2010; Kirsch, 1993).

Students must also negotiate relationships with faculty, advisors, administrators, and peers as they "simultaneously learn how to be a graduate student as well as become socialized into the academic discipline and profession" (Kim & Wolk, 2020, p. 212). These relationships can be both a great support and a source of deep anxiety because students need guides and mentors to successfully complete their degree and establish a career (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Lundell & Beach, 2003). During the latter months or years of their graduate program, the student often juggles ponderous final projects while searching for potential employment and then preparing letters, CVs, and other documents necessary to successfully apply for positions (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Casanave, 2002). Graduate student ontological and epistemological overhauls produce cognitive burdens that can turn even rote tasks into formidable obstacles (Brooks-Gillies, 2020; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

Challenges Faced by International and Underrepresented Students

Graduate students' challenges with writing can exacerbate other graduate school struggles (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Manthey, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Haas, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014). While writers may want

supports, they may be unsure to whom or where to turn and the diverse writing needs of students "require multiply forms of writing support" (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020, p. 4). Students entering the university after years in industry or away from the academy, students with jobs and families, students whose first language is not the language of the university, and other students facing challenges that are invisible or hard to quantify have additional complications that can lead to anxiety. Global economic demands have changed the demographic of the graduate student to include increased populations of working class, international, underrepresented minorities, more female students, and combinations of the preceding which means more research is needed to understand the writing support needs of a diverse graduate student body (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Caplan, 2020; Douglas, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Jones et al., 2013; Russell, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Kirsch, 1993).

The demands of academic writing can be especially daunting to students unfamiliar with or inexperienced in the genres or language of academic writing, even in their native language and even more so for students who may be learning, researching, writing, and publishing in a second, third or so on language (Caplan, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Li, 2014; Casanave, 2002). Statistics from 2006/07 show that over "million international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. Almost half of the international students are graduate students, among whom almost 90% are full-time students" (Colombo, 2011). Graduate International Students (GIS) face challenges with cultural differences, new academic traditions, social relationships and above all, writing (Caplan, 2020; Biswas, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Maher, 2014; Casanave, 2002). One of the epistemological overhauls of a graduate student is language. Academic language structure is very different from conversational conventions or industry jargon and each academic field has their

own specialized vocabulary (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020). For a native speaker, these linguistic challenges are daunting and for a non-native speaker, they can be overwhelming (Kim & Wolke, 2020). Many international students who chose to study in English-centered universities write well in their home language but may struggle with academic English. Their struggles are not confined to the language, but also the culture and traditions of their university and program and the cultures of the geographical location to which they have moved to study English (Kim & Wolke, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Li, 2014).

International students enter the university with "rich linguistic and cultural resources from their previous educational and professional experiences" (Li, 2014, p. 157). Studies have found that many international students scored high on language proficiency tests, successfully completed remedial courses, and thought themselves "very good in writing in my own language" (Kim & Wolk, 2020, p. 222) but struggle writing academically in the language of their institution (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Caplan, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Li, 2014). Multilingual students have learned their academic language through their schooling and thus may be more aware of the technicalities of the language (Li, 2014, p. 158). However, especially at the thesis and dissertation stage of their degree, students working in a language other than their first (or L2+ as I note in Chapter 1) struggle with the length and depth of the language, the genres required, and the styles of the academic writing necessary to complete the projects (Douglas, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Li, 2014).

Academic writing in another language is not just about a change of words and grammar, but an entirely different style and different ways of thinking (Douglas, 2020; Li, 2014) and requires a certain amount of socialization into the program's community to not only learn, but to know to whom to turn to with questions (Kim & Wolke, 2020). Unfortunately, because of

graduate-life struggles, L2+ students may become even more socially isolated; this social isolation can have seriously detrimental effects on their academic and professional progress (Kim and Wolke, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Biswas, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Li, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014; Micciche & Carr, 2011; Denny, 2005). In order to support L2+ populations, universities could provide L2+ students with "extra developments in order to implement writing conventions for making new knowledge" (Douglas, 2020) not just grammar classes as the students may need writing support that "both address the students' pedagogical needs in thesis writing and connect them with peers in a supportive learning environment" (Li, 2014, p. 145) in the forms of "workshops, seminars, disciplinary and institutional conferences, masterclasses, coursework programs and so on" (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b, p. 5). Research shows that the earlier supports are available the more effective they can be for both L2+ and any other students who may face challenges with academic English (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Holmes, et al., 2018; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Paré, 2014). Every graduate student comes with their own challenges, and it is challenging to create supports that answer each need.

First generation, minority, and other marginalized groups of students share some of the struggles of international students as they too can be entering unfamiliar language and cultural territory (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin, 2014; Biswas, 2017; Walkington, 2017; hooks, 2014; Li, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Kirsch & Royster, 2010). Being unfamiliar with the culture, social settings, and possibly struggling a lack of confidence can lead to feelings of isolation. Feelings of isolation in any student can initiate and perpetuate feelings of inadequacy (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Li, 2014; Simpson et al., 2020; Biswas, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014; Micciche & Carr, 2011; Denny, 2005).

First Generation, Minority, Older, and Female Graduate Students' Standpoints

Students without a tradition of succeeding at the university level, whether they be first generation students or students who struggled in their pre-graduate school studies, are more likely to drop out of educational programs (Wollast et al., 2018; Pascarella et al., 2004; Baker, 1998). Students who struggled in their undergraduate degrees, or were not motivated students, may not have the habits or traits that will help them navigate the academic rigors of graduate education (Wollast et al., 2018; Baker, 1998). First generation students, or students whose parents did not complete post-secondary degrees do not always have equitable social capital with "individuals with highly educated parents" and thus are at a disadvantage because students:

> with college-educated parents have better access to human and cultural capital through family relationships. Consequently, compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions about such things as the importance of completing a college degree, which college to attend, and what kinds of academic and social choices to make while in attendance. In turn, this may translate into a comparatively less influential collegiate experience for first-generation students, and perhaps even lower levels of growth in the cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment-oriented outcomes of college. (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 252)

Traditions of education support students at all levels; students navigating the academy without their family's ability to guide them can leave the student feeling isolated and can cause them to miss out on resources and opportunities. Students who are first generational college students tend to show significant success when they intentionally engage socially and academically; thus,

supports that offer opportunities to study with a variety of peers and professors "will act in a compensatory manner, with stronger incremental impacts on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for first-generation students than for their classmates whose parents have more experience with postsecondary education" (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 252).

Older students returning to school are less likely to graduate and if they do persist, their degree plans often take longer than younger students' trajectories (Wollast et al., 2018; Baker, 1998). Students returning to the academy often have more responsibilities than their younger peers like established careers, families, financial obligations, and other factors that can take time away from their education (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Maher, 2014; Lee, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Casanave, 2010; Casanave, 2002). Wollast et al., (2018) found that married women tend to complete their degrees with higher rates than single women and that women returning after years away from school are more likely to seek support (Woldsberger, 2014; Ali & Coate, 2012; Maher et al., 2006).

At the intersection of race and gender, Walkington (2017), hooks (2014), Jones et al. (2013) and Kirsch & Royster (2010) address the additional concerns of women whose challenges include traversing potentially biased and racist perceptions of faculty and their peers. The researchers listed agree that one of the difficulties of being a minority female graduate student is the lack of mentors who understand their positionality and can address their worries. Students' contexts do matter and affect their ability to commit the time and energy requisite in advanced degrees.

The Graduate Writing Wrestle

Regardless of their background, students who have moved into the graduate level of education are expected to have developed appropriate level writing skills and then use those skills "to produce great quantities of writing of different kinds" (Aitchison, 2009, p. 908) and in

a wide variety of genres. Unfortunately, many graduates, even those who are learning and writing in their native language or even a discipline that typically centers writing, are not always prepared for the demands of graduate school writing (Holmes, et al., 2018; Summers, 2016; Ondrusek, 2012; Pinker, 2014; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Bair & Mader, 2013; Aitchison, 2009; Moxley, 2001; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Writing for the academy can difficult because the graduate writer not only must put their ideas (and identity) under a microscope, but they must also "must foresee the situation into which her text will emerge (i.e. the goals, attitudes and expectations of her reader(s), the setting and the occasion of the reading etc.)" which can be especially emotional when submitting to one's advisor or an impersonal editor for publication. Writing at the graduate level is also emotionally risky "because written language and the craft of writing promote greater attention to conceptual sequence and cohesion than speech, the writer is forced to wrestle more carefully and deliberately with ideas" before laying them out for excruciating examination (Paré, 2010, p. 32). Academic writing can be hard on the ego and thus is often lonely (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Wolfsberger, 2014). Graduate students are under increasing pressure to publish (Casanave, 2010; Hjortshoj, 2010; Paré, 2010; Kamler, 2010; Kirsch, 1993) while writing their theses or dissertations which require a great deal of time and require of learning how to write in academic genres and necessitate academic endurance (Hjortshoj, 2014).

Compounding the graduate writing struggle are gaps that may exist between the expectations of academic genres and the skills graduate students possess as they begin their degree (Adams et al., 2020; Henderson & Cook, 2020; Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Maher, 2014; Ondrusek, 2012). Graduate students are expected to be able to navigate everything from basic writing skills to mastering sophisticated genres; many are

not ready when they begin their programs. When the student's undergraduate degree has been one that did not "nurture writing," it is not rare that "the last writing class a student had was freshman composition" (Ondrusek, 2012, p. 180). Douglas (2020) posits that since most graduate students "have not taken a writing course since early in their undergraduate career, if ever, and the transition to graduate writing places a host of new demands on these students" (p. 72). Unfortunately, with the transition between undergrad and graduate school, or even from the masters to the doctoral level, "the ability to enter into scholarly conversations still eludes many graduate students" (Adams et al., 2020, p. 272). Graduate students who are first generation, members of an underrepresented minority, or who have been away from the academy, may find they have an even more difficult time entering scholarly conversations because of language, experience, and prejudices.

Despite many incoming students' lack of requisite skills, it is rare that a university provides for-credit graduate academic writing courses (Rutgers, 2021; Fredrick et al., 2020; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Colombo, 2011; Hjortshoj, 2010; Moxley 2001; Rose & McClafferty, 2001), and thus, too often, students produce "incomprehensible academic gobbledygook" (Moxley, 2001, p. 39) that does not serve the writer or their progress. Often, the specific details of genres are not "made explicit to students" (Caplan, 2020, p. 347) or at least not as explicit as students may wish (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020). Many of the academy's practices, while mandating, do not try to improve writing. Thus, because "[f]ew graduate programs teach writing," (Pinker, 2014, p. 16) students can experience a disconnect between what they actually know about writing and what they are expected to know (Garcia, 2020). Students often feel they don't have much guidance, that they learn by trial and error, and that they are expected to figure out how to fill their skills gaps on their own (Adams et al., 2020;

Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Garcia, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Rose & McClafferty, 2001).

Graduate Writers' Concerns

Writers at the graduate level each have their own issues and concerns and ways of managing their activity systems' contradictions and affordances (Brooks-Gillies, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Paré, 2014; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Concerns range from creating and maintaining a professional image to the fears that can come with feelings of isolation and the nefarious imposter syndrome. Power dynamics in advisor-student relationships can encourage, facilitate, and sometimes obliterate writers' self-efficacy. The path to a graduate degree can be arduous and often, there be monsters here.

A Graduate-Level Writing Course (could) Connote Remediation

Historically post-secondary writing supports were developed (in the US during the 1970s) to address demographics that were entering the academy for the first time and did not have the academic English skills US academic traditions upheld and still upholds. The classes were often titled as remedial courses; thus, seeking assistance with writing connotes inadequacies in the writer, not the academy (Russell, 2013; Hjortshoj, 2010). Unfortunately, when graduate students need writing support, they may believe that they will lose credibility in the eyes of their professors, peers, and advisors if they admit to writing weaknesses and may feel stigmatized if they need assistance with "grammar rules or punctuation conventions simply because of the length of time since they have received writing instruction" (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 73). It can be difficult for someone who is trying to position themselves as a professional to admit they have forgotten some of the basics of writing or someone who is struggling with the myriad genres that graduate students must learn to become legitimized in the academy because admitting weaknesses can feel like being

exposed as being subpar and incapable of completing a degree. These feelings of inadequacy can cause a student to isolate themselves (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Li, 2014; Russell, 2013; Hjortshoj, 2010; Bazerman, 2004).

Graduate Student Isolation

Graduate students isolate themselves from their academic communities for several reasons: lack of confidence, worries about their scholarly inadequacies, fear of feedback, needing uninterrupted space to write, feeling like they don't belong -there are as many reasons to isolate as there are scholars writing "alone by the light of a flickering lamp" (Paré, 2014, p. 25; refer also to Maher, 2014; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Casanave, 2002). Graduate student isolation can be distressing because knowledge and meaning making are of a "profoundly social nature" (Paré, 2014, p. 24) and when "writing occurs mostly in isolation" anxiety can follow (Mewburn et al., 2014, p. 220). Humanities students tend to write more in isolation than do their STEM counter parts who "often experience research and writing activities as collaborative efforts" (Maher, 2014, p. 85) which probably corresponds to the statistics that show humanities' doctoral attrition rates are higher than STEM (Wollast et al., 2018; Bair & Haworth, 1999) because "isolation is a fundamental cause of difficulty and delays in the completion of PhDs" (Hjortshoj, 2010, p. 35). Isolation in addition to the difficulties of writing compounded by intersections of non-traditional student status, funding worries, or family responsibilities can create negative emotional burdens that impair progress in degree plans. Moving through upper-level academic programs means experiencing the gamut of emotions from despair and anxiety to too-short-lived elation (Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Thesen, 2014).

Imposter Syndrome: The Graduate's Closest 'Friend'

Students often worry that they cannot live up to the sometimes ambiguous, but usually challenging expectations of advanced degrees and failures in this space can have detrimental consequences to future careers (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Li, 2014; Paré, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). Writing now comes with perils as a "writer's identity, her status in the community, her relations with others, her graduation and job prospects, here very livelihood are now on the line and at risk" (Paré, 2014, p. 25) with every submission, revision, and rejection. Writers with low self-efficacy struggle with the anxieties of high stakes, trial and error academic writing and can often begin to believe they are the only ones who lack the skills to succeed (Busl et al., 2020). Writing can emotionally disrupt students (Adams et al., 2020; Busl et al., 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Micciche & Carr, 2011) and even confident writers will, at some point in their degree, "encounter academic writing as an emotionally fraught, privately experienced hardship" (Micciche & Carr, 2011, p. 479). Students from non-traditional backgrounds may find their graduate journey even more emotionally distressing. These emotional hardships may be exacerbated in the experiences of students in minority groups who may feel their identities require them to conform to a dominant culture, or first-generation students who may not have an extensive academic literacy background, and students who must first prioritize families and jobs before high stakes writing. Students from L2+ backgrounds, lower socioeconomic groups, first generation graduates, working full-time, and/or balancing other obligations may experience cognitive burdens that exasperate the already potentially distressing challenges of the graduate process (Biswas, 2017; Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin, 2014; hooks, 2014; Li, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Kirsch & Royster, 2010).

As they move through their studies, graduate students may feel like they must pretend to be more scholarly, better writers, and more accomplished than they are or feel. Graduate students especially "feel like imposters in their fields" and are often "'very anxious' about their abilities to write and keep up with disciplinary expectations" (Summers, 2016, p. 129). Graduate writers may fear revealing their personal problems, their weaknesses in writing, or their emotional struggles to their advisor and in their silence, they begin to believe that "they are the *only one* who has *ever* had *this much difficulty* with writing" (Maher, 2014, p. 85). Advanced degrees require much from graduates and when a student feels like they are not "really good enough to be in [a] program or to get a doctorate" (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020, p. 303) they may be suffering from imposter syndrome and without support, may prematurely drop out of their program.

Theses and dissertations are not easy to complete successfully, nor is submitting to and presenting at conferences, nor is writing, submitting, being rejected, revising, and re-revising articles for publications. Dissertations and theses can be overwhelming because of time commitments, the depth of knowledge expected, the complex yet precise genres, (Simpson et al. 2020; Russell, 2013) the uncertainty of expectations juxtaposed with the high stakes as graduation and future employment may depend on the dissertation or thesis's success, (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020) and thus these projects can cause great anxiety (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Russell, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Hjortshoj, 2010). Presenting at conferences can help build students' curriculum vitae, situate students in their community, and while "exhilarating and profoundly formative (as well, perhaps, as terrifying)," (Paré, 2014, p. 26) presenting a paper at a conference can build academic confidence, or destroy it if disaster strikes.

Few academic writing experiences are as fraught with anxiety as publishing. Especially at the doctoral level, but often at the master's level, there is enormous pressure to publish academic articles (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2010; Hjortshoj, 2010; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Kamler, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2008; Casanave, 2002). Smagorinsky (2008) argues that "Writing research articles is, and should be, difficult. If it were easy, anyone could do it. But the issues are complex, the genre difficult to master, and the analytic work mind- and nerve-racking and enormously time-consuming" (p. 394) and the rejection letters, even the revision requests can rattle a writer trying to build their professional reputation. Even more rattling is the pressure to publish as a student in an increasingly competitive field filled with established professionals and fellow aspiring professionals seeking positions, seeking tenure, and seeking status (Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2010; Hjortshoj, 2010; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Smagorinsky, 2008; Casanave, 2002).

Power in the Advisor-Student Relationship

The field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) includes studying writing, observing the processes that produce writing, examining the power structures that call writers to write, and scrutinizing the nature of the epistemological courts that evaluate writing as the shibboleth that grants access to entrance to positions and places in the academy. Writing pedagogy at any level is an integral part of RWS including studying the process of graduate student writers and designing possible writing tools from peer groups to direct instruction to individual consultants (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020). The discipline also studies how composition grants access to power (Starke-Meyerring, 2014) including how students who struggle with access to academic English navigate their writing projects (Lin, 2014).

The relationship between the advisor and the student is of special interest to RWS because of the power dynamic centered on writing. On the one hand, the advisor is a mentor and guide and resource as the student navigates research and writing; on the other hand, the advisor is the judge and works with the jury that the student must satisfy to complete the degree. Because the PhD is the degree that grants the highest form of cultural capital in the academy, the advisor is the top of the hierarchy and must be satisfied before the student can gain access to educational capital (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Guerin, 2014; Moore, 2008; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Major writing projects like theses and dissertations are directed by an advisor, and only the advisor decides when the document is ready to go before a committee. This dynamic in education "impos[es] meanings, ways of thinking, and particular forms of expression, acts as a carrier for the cultural of the dominate classes; it therefore operates to perpetuate specific power relations as they unfold and are expressed in the dynamic of social evolutions" (Grenfell, 2008, p. 159). In the academy, the advisor is both guide and judge; thus, the student's relationship with their advisor can be a source of deep learning, or a site of educational disaster (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Guerin, 2014; Moore, 2008; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

The graduate student is only one of advisors' myriad responsibilities. Advisors are often professors with courses to teach, grants to write, publications to produce, committees to chair, and a gaggle of grad students to guide. Mentoring graduate students through theses and dissertations involves more than providing feedback about a project. Advisors' roles are many and "a supervisor takes up multiple roles in any single interaction with a student and that the supervisor's roles and practices change throughout the student's candidature" (Halse & Bansel, 2012, p. 380; refer also to Brooks-Gillies, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Caruth, 2015; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Maher, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

As “long time members of the research cultures,” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 70) an advisor’s short list includes

- Setting a professional example (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Caruth, 2015; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Paré, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Jones et al., 2013);
- Teaching content (Adams et al., 2020; Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Caruth, 2015; Jones et al., 2013);
- Guiding students through the process of graduate writing projects and publications (Adams et al., 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Jones et al., 2013; Russell, 2013; Smagorinsky, 2008); socializing the student into the professional field (Adams et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Smagorinsky, 2008);
- Being an advocate for the student in the academy (Adams et al., 2020; Caruth, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Casanave, 2002); and
- Sometimes mentoring students who are often marginalized by university “hidden curriculum” practices (Jones et al., 2013, p. 332).

Research shows that many professors “assume that graduate students already possess writing skills … and that if they don’t, it is their own fault or it is somebody else’s responsibility to teach them these skills” (Bair & Mader, 2013, p. 4; refer also to Fredrick et al., 2020; Mewburn et al., 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014). Advisors who assume that students who apply for graduate school are already able to write well in academic genres may not be trained or prepared to teach writing and/or may not want to teach writing in addition to content and/or guiding research (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Pinkert, 2020; Tauber, 2016; Aitchison & Guerin,

2014b; Badenhorst et al., 2014; Maher, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Unfortunately, many students are not prepared for the genres, expectations, and demands of graduate school writing and their inabilities to meet their advisor's expectations can cause great anxiety (Holmes et al., 2018; Summers, 2016; Pinker, 2014; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Bair & Mader, 2013; Ondrusek, 2012; Aitchison, 2009; Moxley, 2001; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000).

Professors who mentor theses and dissertation projects are frequently professors from whom the graduate student has taken classes during the course work phase of their degree. Professors may have taught the appropriate genres and exposed students to preparatory material for their advanced work; however, students may not feel they have learned how to write academically (Pinkert, 2020; Paré, 2010; Casanave, 2002). Pinkert (2020) writes of her study with graduate students in a Rhetoric and Composition program wherein "[t]he faculty believed that they were teaching writing, but the students didn't believe that they were being taught to write" (p. 31). Unfortunately, between the novice status of the graduate students and the long-standing professional emersion of the professor, some students do not make the connections between course work and foundational theses/dissertation work and sometimes professors are unable "to articulate explicit guidelines for writing and reasoning tasks because much of this conceptual knowledge [is] tacit, and deeply embedded in social practices within his field" (p. 32). Professors may struggle with or decide not to teach the writing skills that have become habit to them to students who are not familiar with the expected genres (Fredrick et al., 2020; Paré, 2010; Casanave, 2002). Even professors who are accomplished, well-published, and articulate may have trouble explaining "the rhetorical moves at which she herself is so adept. She seems unable to overcome the automaticity that is a hallmark of expertise; she can do it, but she can't

explain it" (Paré, 2010, p. 37). Students and advisors can become frustrated with the students' gaps in writing knowledge. Advisors are instrumental in the success of the graduate student and any frustration the advisor may feel with their mentee may undermine the student's confidence and cause anxiety and deep self-doubt which can lead to impostor syndrome -all of which only exacerbate writing concerns and slow down, if not halt, progress through degree programs (Henderson & Cook, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2018).

The gaps between what a graduate student knows about their content and academic writing and what their program expects them to know varies with every individual and each program and can adversely affect the relationship between the student and advisor especially during feedback and revision processes (Books-Gillies et al., 2020; Henderson and Cook, 2020; Douglas, 2020; Li 2014; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Caffarella and Barnett, 2000). Feedback practices between advisors and students on writing projects have the potential to cause both parties stress (Adams et al., 2020; Henderson & Cook, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012). Despite the anxiety criticism may cause, for graduate students, "a supervisor's ability to speak directly is crucial to their success, and although sometimes this directness could be uncomfortable it was also a valuable learning experience" (Ali & Coate, 2012, p. 23). The supervising advisor is also the most important source of feedback because they are the gatekeeper to graduation and potentially the key to future employment (Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Thesen, 2014; Maher, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Casanave, 2002). The advisor-student relationship is embedded in a "hierarchical power relationship whereby the doctoral student is constituted as requiring instruction and discipline by an academic supervisor who is able and authorized to accomplish the task by virtue of his or her knowledge, skills and expertise" (Halse

& Bansel, 2012, p. 379). These relationships can risk allowing students to be vulnerable to potential abuses, especially cases where the student is a member of a marginalized demographic (Walkington, 2017). This high-risk relationship can cause students to worry more about pleasing their supervisor than researching topics the advisor might not care for or fear "exploring potentially productive claims" (Fredrick et al., 2020, p. 147) that might challenge their professor's ideologies. Unsuccessful relationships between students and university personnel "have been recognized as principal reasons why students have left doctoral programs and the academic field altogether" (Caruth, 2015, p. 192; refer also to Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

Graduate Students Need Writing Supports

Rhetoric and Writing Studies' purview includes all types of writing pedagogies and support, and a diverse population of graduate students needs a wide range of supports. For this review, a writing support is any person or technology that a writer turns to for assistance, guidance and/or supervision on a writing project. In CHAT terms, a writing support is a tool in the student's writing activity system that facilitates progress towards their object or writing goal. Supports/tools range from red squiggles in Microsoft Word to peers and advisors to sophisticated templates. Graduate writing is fraught with new genres, new languages, new content, all kinds of stressors, and high expectations. Explicit graduate writing instruction often get sidelined (Douglas, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Henderson & Cook, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Haas, 2014; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Russell, 2013; Colombo, 2011; Hjortshoj, 2010; Casanave, 2002; Moxley 2001; Rose & McClafferty, 2001; Kirsch, 1993).

Established Writing Supports

Advisors, writing courses, university writing centers (UWC), writing retreats and camps, peer supports, and writing have and do support graduate writers. Universities, researchers,

advisors, and students themselves create and customize writing tools to fit the wide range of students' writing needs.

Advisors

The first responder for a struggling graduate student is usually their advisor who can also referred to as director or mentor. Whatever their title, this professor is expected to guide each of their graduate students in planning their project, in learning their content, in carrying out their research, and in writing their project; this person is the most important factor in the student's success in writing and graduation (Kim, 2020; Jones, 2016; Thomas, Williams & Case, 2014; Badenhorst et al., 2014; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Bair & Mader, 2013; Cotterall, 2011; Zelazek, 2011; Golde, 2005; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Bair & Haworth, 1999; Cooke, Sims, and Peyrefitte, 1995). Advisors carry large workloads and may not always be available to students and sometimes students are nervous about submitting a draft to their advisor because the draft needs considerable revision and they worry about frustrating their advisor (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Henderson & Cook, 2020; Douglas, 2020; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Li, 2014; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Advisors may feel overwhelmed by their students' needs. For both the advisor and the graduate students' sakes, "writing education is needed to provide opportunities for graduate students to learn outside the typical advisor-advisee apprenticeship" (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020, p. 4; refer also to Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Guerin, 2014; Aitchison, 2014). Universities have, do, and are constantly seeking ways to support graduate writing.

Writing Courses

Explicit instruction in writing at the graduate level occurs in some departments in some universities and includes instruction in courses and can also include classes specifically designed for graduate writing education (Pinkert, 2020; Henderson, 2020; Haas, 2014; Badenhorst et al., 2014; Rose and McCafferty, 2001). Pinkert (2020), Henderson (2020), Badenhorst et al. (2014), Rose and McCafferty (2001) explore the pros and cons of classes designed to teach writing across disciplines. The classes discussed benefited most students that participated, according to the studies, and the only major drawbacks were time and specialization. Time was an issue because the writing class necessitated an extra class in the students' course work and specialization became problematic because graduate writing does vary widely across the disciplines and some students felt the support would have been more effective if the mentor, teacher, or class were more focused on instruction for specific projects. Although students do tend to have less anxiety about writing when they have explicit instruction, writing courses are not always solutions to graduate writing struggles (Henderson & Cook, 2020).

Crafting a writing course that includes all that a graduate student needs is difficult because of the variety of expectations. Also, because graduate level education "aim[s] to produce the independent researcher who is largely self-teaching" (Mewburn et al., 2014, p. 22) and a writer who "is forced to wrestle more carefully and deliberately with ideas" (Paré, 2010, p. 32), writing is not a skill that once learned cross applies to all the genres of a graduate program (Casanave, 2002). It is also difficult to fit writing courses into already demanding course and writing requirements (Pinkert, 2020).

A small number of institutions have standalone graduate writing programs. Rutgers' University Graduate Writing Program offers a model for effective writing instruction. The goals

of the program are to "support graduate students of all disciplines in their current and future writing goals, from coursework papers to scholarly articles and dissertations" (Rutgers University, 2021). To achieve their mission, they offer "a range of workshops and events, such as writing "'bootcamps' and guest lectures" and writing courses to assist with specific graduate writing projects. The professors who teach the classes are published, "full-time faculty members in the Rutgers English Department's nationally recognized Writing Program" who have PhDs in disciplines from English to Social Work and include professors who "have robust experience with STEM writing" (Rutgers University, 2021). The classes for graduate writers are free, but non-credit and do appear on transcripts.

The classes and program are not and do not offer an editing service; however, they "do provide extensive sentence-level comments" (Rutgers University, 2021) and understand that stylistic and grammar issues may be misunderstandings of genre expectations. Rutgers' writing courses offer one-on-one opportunities with the professors. The intent of the courses is to "develop the skills you need to independently revise and edit your writing across your career" (Rutgers University, 2021). Three classes are offered as of July 2021. Graduate Writing is an introductory course that gives specific instruction on drafting, revision, developing "professional writing habits," and surveys "several important scholarly genres: abstracts, literature reviews, seminar papers, and conference papers" (Rutgers University, 2021). Writing for Publication provides instruction specific to preparing articles "for submission to a scholarly journal in your discipline" and includes "everything from revising manuscripts to setting realistic deadlines to responding effectively to editorial and reviewer feedback" (Rutgers University, 2021). There is also a class, Writing the Dissertation, that "will help you achieve your dissertation writing goals"

at any stage of the process and focuses on instruction to "sharpen your argument" as well as "make timely progress towards the completion of your degree" (Rutgers University, 2021).

The courses are designed to be inclusive; any student with any background is welcome and can benefit. The professors' aims are to teach students to "learn to write, read, and think like a professional scholar" by learning "how to structure your argument so that it clearly enters a scholarly conversation and speaks to its target audience" (Rutgers University, 2021). The Rutgers' Graduate Writing Program website promises that the courses will "challenge ingrained assumptions about how writing works" and the courses include peer interactions and feedback from across disciplines "in a warm and supportive atmosphere, which will benefit even the most advanced and proficient graduate writers" (Rutgers University, 2021). Rutgers' program is intensive, accessible, and focuses on the professionalization of graduate students through writing; the research conducted for this review did not reveal other programs that offered as comprehensive supports as Rutgers.

The University Writing Center

Universities frequently provide support systems for writers at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in writing centers and more often are tailoring options to meet graduate students' needs (Fredrick et al., 2020; Pinkert, 2020; Holmes et al., 2018; Tauber, 2016; Summers, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014; Bair & Mader, 2013; Russel, 2013; Denny, 2005). However, given the "high-stakes and highly-technical" nature of graduate writing, the "disciplinary expertise requires a level of writing and disciplinary knowledge that both GWC consultants and graduate students sometimes lack" (Summers, 2016, p. 118). Good writing necessarily involves "showing a draft to a sample of real readers and seeing if they can follow it" (Pinker, 2014, p. 16) as well as redrafting and re-showing through several drafts before writing is acceptable. Having additional readers can

help with mechanics, having target-audience readers can help with coherence, having support in writing is essential to success. Biswas (2017) worries that "[w]riting centers offer minimal tutorial support for graduate students in which students receive feedback and suggestions from tutors" (p. 7) but not the intense and continuous support their projects may need. Every discipline has its own jargon, expectations, formats, genres, etc. of which both new (and sometimes experienced) graduate students and writing center consultants are unfamiliar or unpracticed, making it difficult for the writing center to address specific graduate's concerns. The literature shows that universities are exploring ways to integrate graduate-level writing support by partnering with writing centers and graduate schools (Lannin & Townsend, 2020; Biswas, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Summers, 2016; Russell, 2013). Summers' (2016) article centers on the lack of training and support writing centers may offer graduate student tutors and offers ideas for classes and "toolkits" that individual mentors could put together to help struggling writers. However, she acknowledges that often writing center consultants lack the knowledge in "terms of form and content" that graduate level "high-stakes and highly-technical documents" (p. 118) require. Even when a consultant has graduate-level experience, they need to have the time and means to access the details of individual student's projects (Lannin & Townsend, 2020; Tauber, 2016; Summer, 2016).

Writing Retreats and Camps

One writing support universities frequently host is the writing camp or retreat. Retreats and camps are frequently sponsored by the university writing centers, libraries, or graduate schools and sometimes by specific departments for their own students (Busl et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Pinkert, 2020; Knowles & Grant, 2014; Li, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murry, 2014; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). These writing spaces "can serve as an important launching pad for deeper cross-campus involvement in writing" (Busl et al., 2020, p. 245).

Writing retreats and camps that have been and are implemented follow a similar model of beginning with introductions, talking about writing, setting goals, periods of writing and then reflections and some retreats and camps provide spaces for feedback (Busl et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Knowles & Grant, 2014; Li, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murry, 2014; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Writing retreats and camps provide a space, support, and sometimes snacks for graduate writers working on various writing projects.

The research and my experiences both as a participant in UTEP writing retreats and a participant in UTEP writing camps show that accountability at the writing camp/retreat does help decrease writing anxiety and helps participants focus on the task at hand. Busl et al., (2020) write about the difference between "Just Write" camps wherein scholars primarily focus on using the space and time to write and "Writing Process" camps where instruction in writing is made available. The researchers conclude that the "Writing Process" camps are more effective at producing longer term writing confidence and productive writing behaviors after the camps. Overall, participants from the various studies expressed appreciate for the time and space and resources to write and writing camps can be a jumping off point for writing groups or writing partnerships (Busl et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Knowles & Grant, 2014; Li, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murry, 2014; Russell, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Graduate writing retreats and camps are, unfortunately, not the panacea for all graduate writers' ills and while students reported that the camp or retreat itself boosted their writing performance, that boost was "often limited" (Murry, 2014, p. 96). Furthermore, within months, most students had returned to their pre-camp writing patterns (Busl et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Knowles & Grant, 2014; Li, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murry, 2014; Russell, 2013).

Peer Support

Universities often host multiple support opportunities, departments often hold their own supports in response to their students' needs, individual professors will often build supports for their students, and graduate students can and do cobble together support systems for themselves. There are many university disciplines that study writing, "including but not limited to Rhetoric and Writing, Writing Centers, TESOL, Education, Communication, Speech Pathology, Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition, Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing in the Disciplines, Technical Communication, Professional Writing, and Curriculum and Instruction" (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020, p.9). There is much being done, but too often the disciplines doing the work do not communicate with each other either to cooperate or share findings, thus students may not know where to look for the specific supports for their specific situation. Seeking out peer supports can help students not only negotiate their specific writing struggles, but also shake "the image of the struggling lone scholar" (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020, p.8).

Graduate projects can be overwhelming even to an experienced writer as upper-level projects require more time, depth, and can mean denial or access to funding, graduation, and employment (Simpson et al., 2020). Peer support can take the form of peer mentoring wherein more advanced peers work with beginners, or less experienced writers. When setting out on writing projects, less experienced or beginning writers can feel anxiety that inhibits even starting the project; however, working with those "who are more advanced in their research careers" (Mewburn et al., 2014, p. 226) can create a safe space to ask questions, look at model texts, and experiment. Research shows that structured peer mentoring is an invaluable resource for both mentor and mentee (Simpson et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2006). Peer mentoring allows the nascent scholar to ask questions they may hesitate to bring to their mentor and to share raw first drafts

while the mentor gets a chance to practice being an authority and review writing skills in an environment where the power imbalance is much less threatening (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Mewburn et al., 2014; Maher et al., 2006).

Writing Groups

A popular form of writing support is the writing group. Writing groups is a broad term that generally refers to a deliberate situation where at least three people "come together to work on their writing in a sustained way" (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b, p. 7) and can include providing instruction or feedback, talking about writing, motivating reluctant writers, increasing confidence in abilities, and providing social support in general (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Haas, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Murry, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003). These groups vary in size, purpose, format, structure, and composition, but they can play a role "in how the dilemmas and contradictions that haunt the writing of research may be more fully lived" (Thesen, 2014, p. 173). All share a common value in creating a safe space to open up "collegial possibilities where researchers can focus explicitly on writing as a central activity of academic life" (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b, p. 12). Some groups are monodisciplinary while others include a variety of disciplines. Having a reader from another field can be helpful by providing "opportunity to explain and clarify disciplinary conventions to an audience, thus, raising one's own awareness of these disciplinary conventions" (Kim & Wolke, 2020, p. 233; refer also to Haas, 2014). Mono and multidisciplinary groups engage in rhetorical analysis of the genres graduate students must master and can assist and guide each other, especially more experienced students, to understanding and correctly addressing the genre's requirements (Li, 2014).

When working on large projects like theses or dissertations, graduate students can isolate themselves to focus on their work and that isolation can become problematic (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Guerin, 2014; Haas, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). Writing is a social activity; graduate genres grew out of social situations wherein academic collectives formulated the expectations for presenting research and knowledge claims and subsequently have become the expectations for graduate degrees (Bazerman, 2004). Writing groups can provide structure, relationships, balance, emotional support that might not be available in the frequently competitive department environment (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Guerin, 2014; Ings, 2014; Murry, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Writing groups can provide many kinds of writing supports, but the social aspect is often cited as one of the most important elements (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Ings, 2014; Paré, 2014; Murry, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

Groups can create an exigency to write because one doesn't want to show up to writing group without having met goals or at least be able to "report some progress" (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020, p. 198). Groups can also assist in understanding writing expectations like genres, process, and progression, as members share their texts and "observe how others approach the practice of writing" and talk about writing (Bosanquet et al., 2014, p. 214). It is in writing groups that writers can experience a "collective analysis" through rich conversations wherein writers can practice and analyze their "scholarly voices" as they move from practice to professional situations (Ings, 2014, p. 197). The conversations that emerge in writing groups about writing can benefit members by increasing their understanding about everything from basic grammar to specialized technical aspects, but also build a professional community in which

members can practice giving and receiving feedback in a safe, lower-risk environment (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Guerin, 2014; Maher, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003). When peers read each other's work, they give each other a chance to receive low-risk feedback before submitting it to advisors or editor which not only helps the writer revise, but also can help them learn how to accept criticism (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Haas, 2014; Ings, 2014; Li, 2014; Paré, 2014). In addition to receiving feedback, writers can learn from reading and critiquing each other's work because "[o]ften the analysis of another person's work enables us to gain useful insights into our own practice" (Ings, 2014, p. 197).

Peer Chats to Professional Conversations. Writing together and talking about writing develops the writers' abilities to enter the professional conversations of their field (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Guerin, 2014; Haas, 2014; Ings, 2014). As writers in groups work through graduate projects, groups can help them move into their professional identity by making a safe space for conversations about the "expectations and conventions in the world of research" and enact the roles of critic, guide, and other "practices that are part of scholarly identities" (Guerin, 2014, p. 136). The writing group's safety comes from a flattened hierarchy where group members may have more experience, but not more authority than one another; therefore, less experienced members are less likely to feel intimidated and more likely to seek critique and advice (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Haas, 2014). Writing groups that contain social elements can also serve as networks that provide members to access and "insights into the functioning of institutions" including the "cultural norms that are not always readily apparent, advice on how to

access information that would be useful" (Maher et al., 2006, p.29) and the unwritten curricula of the university and department (Jones, et al., 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003).

Examples of Writing Group Formats. Writing groups have taken many forms as universities, departments, professors, and students design and implement support to meet the writing needs of graduate writers. Maher (2014) writes about a group wherein participants met at rotating hosts' homes, set goals, wrote, shared a lunch while updating goals, wrote more and then ended the session with each participant reporting out their writing accomplishments before leaving for the day. The group started with meetings at the organizing professor's home and as they became socially close, "students began volunteering to host writing sessions in their homes" (p. 84).

Ings' (2014) online writing group organized via social media, Facebook, and used the digital platform to plan writing days at local coffee shops and eateries. The social media platform allowed members to discuss their struggles with writing, "but also about where to find relevant information" from the social to the academic (p. 195). The face-to-face group extended into the digital sphere where members electronically exchanged their drafts and gave/received feedback. Some met remotely when physical meetings were difficult, but real-time conversations were desired. Simpson et al.'s (2020) online group had great difficulty meeting physically, so they organized Google Docs to exchange documents and receive feedback asynchronously. People who exchanged feedback occasionally met one-on-one to "provide further explanation on comments" (p. 180). Simpson et al., (2020) also studied a group that met weekly, discussed progress at the beginning of meetings, talked about challenges during the week, talked about possible solutions, read their work out loud to each other, provided feedback to each other, and spent a large chunk of time writing. The group was small and consisted of "students from

specialized fields within the same broad discipline" which made feedback important because the writer needed to make their ideas clear to someone with less knowledge of the material (p. 173).

Ings' (2014) Studio Model writing group began with a facilitating professor but shifted organizational responsibilities to the students after they become comfortable with the format and with each other. In the Studio Model, students share out their work with specific questions that guide the readers in the type and level of critique they need. At the beginning of each session, each writer has time to present and facilitate a conversation about their question. Then there is silent sustained writing time and then at the end of the session, writers read their revisions and talk about their changes while enjoying a community meal. Mewburn et al.'s (2014) "Shut up & Write" is a writing group that started as a Meetup.com group but is now open to the general public and uses Facebook and Twitter as well as Meetup.com to organize sessions; however, these groups are not formally structured with the same members showing up repeatedly. They are loosely structured, open to anyone, and frequently focus on the social aspects of fiction, nonfiction as well as academic writing and conversations stray from "technical skills of writing" to visual representations of compositions, to the struggles of being a human being (p. 224).

Another innovative writing group idea is Wolfsberger's (2014) Applause/Marathon Group. The group does not provide feedback from peers or professors but does find ways to celebrate writer's successes and progress and support them when they struggle. The motivators include stickers, loud rounds of applause for writers after they report their accomplishments, and a general air of playful celebration of writing. The facilitators focused on providing motivation, setting goals for projects, and encouraging writers to endure (the marathon aspect). Murry's (2014) research focuses on organizing micro-groups that morph according to the writers' needs and time. Groups set their own meetings time slots and monitored themselves. The above models

were crafted with specific populations or goals varying degrees of success. The most consistent struggle of writing groups across the research spectrum is finding times that all members can attend (Simpson et al., 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Haas, 2014; Ings, 2014; Li, 2014; Maher, 2014; Murry, 2014; Wolfsberger, 2014).

L2+ Writers and Writing Groups. Writing groups can be especially beneficial to L2+ writers. Biswas' (2017) research shows that international students tend to seek assistance from their advisor before their peers and Guerin (2014) addresses L2+ students' concerns about the validity of feedback from fellow L2+ students, but an L2+ writing group can be an effective support (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin, 2014; Li, 2014). Li's (2014) L2+ writing group meet consistently on a weekly basis; however, the make-up of the group changed constantly as semesters and student needs and schedules changed. The members of the group consisted of "ESL research students at varying stages" (p. 147) of their graduate programs and crossed disciplines. The group's fluctuating dynamics necessitated a consistent facilitator who provided an available space to students who sought language support. Students who commit to going to a session submit a text to the group facilitator who sends all the texts to all the participants with the understanding that each participant would arrive at the meeting having read several the texts and be prepared to discuss them with the group. The conversations about writing and language assist students in understanding grammar, diction, genres and became an access point for L2+ students to ask questions about and learn institutional culture and traditions (Li, 2014). Like the research from other writing groups, Li's group found that a flattened hierarchy allowed the members to discuss their struggles with the academic language and provided opportunities for more experienced peers to mentor their less experienced peers. Ultimately, the group provided

academic writing support as well as a social support for international students who were not entirely acclimated to their US schools.

Writing Groups' Other'ed Potential. Writing groups have the great potential to serve underrepresented populations, non-traditional students, and first-generation students. Pascarella et al. (2004) address the efficacy of socialization and engagement in guiding first-generation students through the academy and writing groups have the potential to be sources of socialization as well as supporting graduate writers with feedback on their writing (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Busl et al., 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Haas, 2014; Li, 2014; Murry, 2014; Paré, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Giving feedback can help students' writing because "the analysis of another person's work enables us to gain useful insights into our own practice (Ings, 2014, p. 197). Students who are returning to school after time away may be able to ask questions in a writing group that they would not want to ask their advisor for fear of losing academic credibility (Simpson et al., 2020; Aitchison, 2014; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Guerin, 2014; Maher, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Maher et al., 2006; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Accountability factors can motivate students whose competing priorities often necessitate attending to their writing last (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Haas, 2014; Wolfsberger, 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003). The potential peer mentoring aspect of writing groups can be instrumental in finding situationally similar mentors for underrepresented people (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2006)

Writing Group Challenges. While writing groups have proven to be mostly effective, there are drawbacks. The most consistent challenge to facilitators across groups is getting students to consistently show up for meetings (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin,

2014; Haas, 2014; Ings , 2014; Maher, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Li, 2014; Simpson et al., 2014; Wolfsberger, 2014) especially in STEM programs where the writing aspect of students' work is often marginalized in favor of research, experiments, presentations, etc. (Simpson, et al., 2020). Groups can dissolve without a formal structure or specific facilitator (Garcia, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Haas, 2014; Maher, 2014; Murry, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014) and sometimes, even though writing groups are often a source of emotional support, hurt feelings can cause groups to disintegrate (Guerin, 2014). Sustaining a writing group is hard work and requires individuals who are committed to the success of the members, but also the group as a whole (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Haas, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014). Thus, while writing groups are viable supports, they are not "the panacea for all that ails graduate writers" (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020, p. 206; refer also to Kim & Wolke, 2020; Starke-Meyerring, 2014).

At the Intersection of Gender, Language, and Race

Nobody's making me do this. – Kirsch (1993)

Kirsch's quote reminds graduate students that graduate school is not only a choice, but a privilege. Kirsch's (1993) work is three decades old, and women are finding places in the upper echelons of the academy; however, gender does still factor into the graduate school experience (Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Wolfsberger, 2014; Aitchinson & Mowbray, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Kirsch, 1993) as does age and place of geographical origin and "diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (Mewburn et al., 2014, p. 219; refer also to Fredrick et al., 2020; Walkington, 2017; Li, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Casenave, 2010; Casanave, 2002; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). As a result of historical difficulties gaining access to advanced education, women are still often perceived as

outsiders who lack the authority of their male counterparts (Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Maher et al., 2006; Kirsch, 1993; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). While the number of successful women completing graduate programs often exceeds those of men, (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013) women in the academy can still find themselves having a more difficult time achieving recognition in terms of full-time tenure track positions, the equivalent in industry, and financial compensation as their male counter parts (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Maher et al., 2006; Kirsch, 1993; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). Many of the women in graduate school are returning after years away pursuing family, industry, or other personal paths (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Mewburn et al., 2014; Casanave, 2010). Many of the studies in this review were written by or involved participants that are women returning to the academy, but there is not much research conducted specifically for and about this population; there is even less specific research aimed at those women whose intersections also include studying in their second or third or etc. language.

While studying human development, Engeström (2005) was moved to encourage researchers to study the struggles of learners during periods that center a "significant and relatively long-term qualitative change" and create studies that "make sense of the surrounding institution" (p. 41). The graduate school journey is challenging and fraught with difficult tasks that give rise to difficult emotions (Adams et al., 2020; Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey, 2020; Busl et al., 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; Guerin, 2014; Maher, 2014; Paré, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Micciche & Carr, 2011; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). Universities that provide support systems for graduate writers are investing in their students with the tacit understanding that graduate students are capable of negotiating their degree programs

and seeking out assistance as they require (Henderson & Cook, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Hjortshoj, 2010; Moxely, 2001).

With an increase in overlapping identities comes a variety in the types of writing supports needed and wanted. Graduate students who are older than those whose trajectories were not interrupted (or not interrupted for long) may find the academy has changed drastically since they were students and thus, they may have a harder time adjusting to the rigors, demands, and expectations. They also often have accumulated many roles to which they must attend while attending to their degrees and may sometimes have a hard time differentiating criticism of performance from criticism of person (Fredrick et al., 2020; Casanave, 2010; Kirsch, 1993). It is important, as the populations of women returning to the academy are not insubstantial and those numbers only promise to grow, to design research that examines how women in complex situations "address and represent audiences, and how they negotiate and establish their authority in written discourse" (Kirsch, 1993, p. xvii) and what supports may assist them to the completion of their degrees. In order to improve access to writing supports for all students, it is important to study the most marginalized voices and strive to include all voices in the university's discussion about the design and content of graduate writing supports (Simpson et al., 2020; Walkington, 2017; Russell, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Houle, 2009; Ryan & Natalle, 2001; Casanave, 2002; McClish & Bacon, 2002; Hekman, 1997; Kirsch, 1993). Women in the university provide a point of view that can be, and too often is, marginalized through centuries old traditions that value the masculine over the feminine (Jones et al., 2017; Ali & Coate, 2012; Kirsch, 1993).

Backing Women in the Academy

Women returning from industry or personal paths to graduate programs share the objectives (in CHAT terminology, objects, and outcomes) of all graduate students, and their

trials. These objectives are not easy and "resist and hit back," yet our objectives (graduation, employment) also "give directionality, purpose and meaning to the collective activity, yet they are frustratingly elusive" (Engeström, 2005, p. 93). A culmination of all the writing projects (objects) that lead up to graduation (outcome), theses and dissertations are "a final test, but also, entirely or partially, the first significant contribution to the disciplinary conversations" (Russell, 2013, p. 172) and carry the hopes and dreams of their writer between every line and on every page. The more activity systems (refer to definition in Chapter Three) that overlap a student's life, the more difficult navigating their graduate program may be (Adams et al., 2020; Simpson et al., 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Maher, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Casanave, 2010; Maher et al., 2006; Casanave, 2002; Kirsch, 1993).

Women who are returning to school often juggle family roles with their student responsibilities and often work obligations as well (Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Maher et al., 2006; Kirsch, 1993). These "balancing-acts demanded of many academic women between their professional and private lives," and their activity systems intersections impact greatly "their research productivity" (Maher et al., 2006, p. 27) and complicate students' abilities to persist in their writing and progress in their degrees. There are men who also balance family, employment, and school; however, "women doctoral students, more so than their male counterparts, need to make time by balancing their family and scholarly commitments" (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013, p. 861; refer also to Bosanquet et al., 2014; Casanave, 2010; Maher et al., 2006; Aronson & Swanson, 1991), and thus warrant research that centers their experiences (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Kirsch, 1993; Aronson & Swanson, 1991).

Older and Wiser: Graduate Woman Returning to UTEP

Over eighty percent of the student body at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) are Hispanic (UNIVSTATS, 2020; Sanchez, 2019; College Factual, 2019). College Factual.com (2019) ranks UTEP in the top ten percent of school popular with international students. As of 2019 census data, approximately 1,793 students from forty-three different countries attended UTEP; 521 of those students are international graduate students. UTEP not only serves a large Hispanic and international population, but also a population that varies in age, experience, socioeconomics, and cultures. Mature women of color face intersectionality that can complicate their educational progress (Walkington, 2017; hooks, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Kirsch & Royster, 2010) as can being an L2+ learner (Biswas, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin, 2014; Li, 2014) thus UTEP is host to a population that is at risk of marginalization.

This study seeks to understand the writing experiences of women who are returning to graduate school after time away and includes women who have complicated and overlapping activity systems. The works of Walkington (2017), hooks (2014), Jones et al., (2013) and Kirsch & Royster, (2010) center the concerns of racism and genderism that plague black women in graduate school; the international and local L2+ students of UTEP share many of their concerns. Women of color, L2+ women, and especially those whose intersectionalities include both identities can experience negative attitudes from peers and professors that discourage them and impede their progress (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Guerin, 2014; Biswas, 2017; Walkington, 2017; hooks, 2014; Li, 2014; Jones et al., 2013; Kirsch & Royster, 2010). Although more women are entering the academy as professors, often, especially in the STEM fields, few women are taught by other women which can lead to a lack of mentoring and guiding through the graduate program process (Walkington, 2017; hooks, 2014; Jones et al., 2013). Some of the dearth could

be a result of genderism or racism or both, but it could also be partly due to the women's reluctance to cause trouble or show weakness by asking for help (hooks, 2014). The activity systems of women who are at risk for marginalization provide a standpoint from which researchers can study the graduate writing process by listening to their lived experiences and hearing their concerns. Research that explores their concerns and experiences can provide starting points for designing university sponsored writing supports that could potentially benefit all graduate students.

Summary

Chapter 2 has presented a literature review centering graduate school writing, its purpose, and expectations and why writing is the mode the academy uses to evaluate students. The review also combined literature in higher education and RWS to describe the gaps between student ability and institution instruction and to explore what supports have been and are in place and why supports are needed. This chapter also describes the positionalities of the population whose perspective this study centers. The literature presented in this review guided and informed my analysis, discussions, and conclusions.

Chapter 3 describes the study's design, methods, data collection and analysis. It will elaborate on the work I conducted with my participants and explains why action research, Feminist Standpoint Theory, and Cultural Historical Activity Theory were selected for and how they guide this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This descriptive and exploratory study's aims were to (a) better understand the graduate writing experiences of women returning to the academy after time away pursuing life and career paths; (b) if writing manifests as a barrier to completing their graduate programs; (c) ascertain what kinds of graduate-level writing supports they find most helpful/least helpful; and (d) then suggest steps UTEP, and potentially other institutions, can take to design writing initiatives that target the specific needs of this demographic. This chapter provides information about the research design, data collection, and analysis. The study is exploratory in that it follows the participants' journeys and does not dictate their end goals or how they progress. It is descriptive in that the interviews and support sessions were open-ended and allowed room for the participants to discuss their lives inside and outside of their graduate writing projects. As the researcher, I acted as a gentle guide and/or witness for multiple participants' experiences. The purpose was not to itemize the supports available at UTEP, but instead, "to bring into focus participant-generated descriptions of the ways that graduate students developed their writing abilities" (Pinker, 2020, p. 25). To address these goals, I employed a qualitative action research methodology that brings together action research with Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST).

Research Design

To deepen an understanding of the experiences of graduate women returning to the academy, FST guided the selection of participants and ethos of working with participants; CHAT provided terminology to describe and map participants' activity systems and reveal contradictions that identify places where tools can be developed, tested, evaluated, redesigned, and re-

implemented, or conversely, identify affordances where current supports are working. Action research aimed to make the process, findings, and insights from the study relevant to participants and to the institution.

Action Research

Projects that employ action research bring participant and researcher together in a shared activity. Writing is a social practice (Caplan, 2020; Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Aitchison, 2014; McNely, 2012; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005). As such, the researcher can become part of the participant's writing activity system as a support, or CHAT tool, that enables the participant to progress towards a goal or an object (in CHAT terms). In action research, the process is "grounded in practice and is fundamentally collaborative" with participants "rather than researching *about* a phenomenon" and, "similar to academic writing, relies on a dialogic and iterative process that continues to evolve through ongoing inquiry," (Douglas, 2020, p. 73) so the nature of the research is ongoing, cyclical, adaptive and iterative. The researcher and participant examine ideas, set goals, design, and create tools, and implement those tools to move the participant towards her object and periodically reflect on the efficacy of their efforts. Then based on that reflection, they adjust the goals, programs, ideas, supports etc. to continue towards the objective (Acosta & Goltz, 2014; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Casanave, 2002; Waterman et al., 2001; Noffke, 1997; Adelman, 1993). The technology industry, social sciences, education, and medical fields frequently employ action research to identify and solve problems in a system (Noffke, 1997; Adelman, 1993).

Action research asks the researcher to be part of the community and solve problems with participants through inquiry, developing solutions, reflecting on viability, then adjusting solutions as needed (Canagarajah, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Cushman,

1998, 1999, 2002). The participants in this study did not drive the questions but were part of reflection on and the design of potential solutions; however, the bulk of the tool design was conducted by the researcher as the writing expert.

Action Research History

The first action research described in the literature was performed by German social psychologist Kurt Lewin beginning in the 1930s after Lewin fled Nazi Germany and his concern for displaced Jews is apparent in his concern for democracy in research practices (Noffke, 1997; Adelman, 1993). Lewin's methods asked researchers to create spaces where participants could actively engage in finding solutions to social issues in order to enact actual change (Noffke, 1997; Adelman, 1993). Lewin's students Cartwright and Zander continued the practice of action research in order to reach "systematic enquiry for all participants in the quest for greater effectiveness through democratic participation" (Adelman, 1993, p. 7; refer also to Noffke, 1997). Early action research sought out the experiences of minority groups and continues to be a methodology social scientists use to "help solve social conflicts" (Adelman, 1993, p. 8) that crop up in the social sciences, including educational practices. Lewin's theories influenced John Dewey, Stephen Corey, and other salient educational researchers (Ferrance, 2000; Noffke, 1997; Adelman, 1993). Although almost one hundred years old, "action research is an important area not only in education and educational research but in a wide range of social endeavors" (Noffke, 1997, p. 306) from designing software to training teachers to crafting policy. The ethos of Lewin's methodology grounds action research in work that seeks to give voice to groups of people whose stories are often overlooked by groups "that have the power" and thus "far greater influence on social policy" (Adleman, 1993, p.11). The objectives of this research project use action research with members

of a specific, often unheard group and seek their input in creating writing support tools that facilitate their writing projects/objects in the context of their lived experiences.

Action Research in Practice

Action research asks that the researcher do more than observe and hypothesize. In order to be effective in seeking the lived experiences of the community, the researcher must join the community in their practices, challenges, and goals; they must "enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary" (Freire, 1994, p. 31; refer also to Canagarajah, 2012; Kirsch & Royster, 2010; Cushman, 1998, 1999, 2002). Researchers who become part of the community that they are studying must act with reciprocity, listen carefully, and focus on problem solving to meet the goals of the community, the participant and then the researcher (Canagarajah, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Cushman, 1998, 1999, 2002). In this study, I am the researcher and also a graduate student who is a woman returning to school after years away pursuing a career and personal endeavors and thus is a member of the same community as her participants. By joining their writing activity system as a writing system support tool and a community member, I take part in their writing journey, and they take part in mine.

Part of the intent of action research is to empower people by creating options that increase the control people have over their lives (Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006, p. 854). Inclusion and enfranchisement are instrumental in developing democratic and effective interventions from ideas that emerge when the participant is part of the problem-solving process. Action research embraces both theory building and practical application by identifying a problem and seeking a solution through collaboration between researcher and participant (Acosta & Goltz, 2014; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Waterman et al., 2001). In this study, I, the researcher, worked with each participant to identify challenges that arose while the participant

wrote for their graduate program. The iterative cycle sought to identify the tensions, contradictions, and affordances that arose in the participant's activity system as they worked through graduate writing projects then explored solutions and reflected on the results. The researcher and participant collaborated in analyzing the problems, designing potential solutions, and then implementing the solutions. After implementation, the researcher and participant evaluated the efficacy of the solution and adjusted as necessary to continue to the next iteration. Waterman et al. (2001) write that one of the strengths of action research is that it "allows participants to explore practical and theoretical understanding from a variety of perspectives, for example, in different settings or with different people, that could serve to increase the general application of the outcomes of the process" (p. 13). In this study, the participants and researcher were mostly from different academic fields. Our different experiences provided democratic, fecund, and unique perspectives about a shared experience (graduate writing).

"Reflection, which is essential to action" (Freire, 1994, p. 35) is key to the success of an action research and is "directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships" (Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006, p. 854). The research process does not end with one cycle of investigation but aims to test its own recommendations through iterative cycles of theorizing, testing, reflecting, and trying again (Acosta & Goltz, 2014; Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Ferrance, 2000; Waterman et al., 2001). Baum, MacDougal, and Smith (2006) assert that action research can be used "as a mechanism through which to put the rhetoric of participation into action" (p. 855) or, in other words, turn theories into practice. The participants and researcher in this study were able to put into practice ideas that had the potential to improve the participants' writing experiences and then reflect on the outcome.

To be truly respectful of the participants, the researcher must be invited by the individuals of the community (Wilson, 2008; Cushman, 2002). In this study, I recruited participants by working with attendees at the UTEP Graduate School writing support venues like their monthly writing retreats. At the beginning of each retreat, I introduced myself and explained the nature of my research and then made myself available to any student at the retreat who had concerns about their writing. When an attendee asked for support, I worked with them and then if they expressed interest, I provided my contact information and a summary of this study's purpose and waited for invitations from participants either to listen to their reflections about writing during an interview, or an invitation to join them on a writing project. We worked together on a writing project or writing projects of the participants' choice. The projects ranged from preparing medical school applications to entire dissertations. Each participant tried to meet with me once a week, but circumstances frequently changed, and we often met once every other week, or several times a week as the participant needed or as project deadlines surfaced. During each meeting we discussed what tools were working for the participant, what progress they were making, and what might be helpful going forward.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) is a form of feminist theory that centers identifying power imbalances, analyzing why they occur and creating strategies that could bring equality to the community (Walkington, 2017, Houle, 2009; Crasnow, 2009; Kirsch & Royster, 2010; Fleckenstein, 2001; Foss et al., 1999; Aronson & Swanson, 1991; Gearhart 1979). While there are variations in the definition of feminism, this study adheres to "the concept of 'feminism' as a variously articulated commitment to justice, equality, empowerment, and peace, while keeping the contours of this notion dynamic and open" (Kirsch & Royster, 2010, p. 644). Feminist

theories vary but in general, the tenets of feminism are: (1) Women and other groups experience marginalization, which limits "access to important societal resources" and "[t]he recognition of this fact impacts the daily life of feminists as we strive to avoid becoming part of oppressive systems and as we deal with people who have been oppressed;" (2) That "our personal experience cannot be divorced from its social context" in other words, our personal lives are influenced by our "social surroundings;" (3) and "as members of groups with secondary status, we have double vision; we live and function both within and outside of prevailing systems;" however, in order to create change or achieve career/personal goals "[w]e often find it necessary to work within and try to succeed in the very systems we would like to change" (TWIG Writing Group, 1996, p. 18). Trying to live and work in systems that feel oppressive is a struggle, but feminism asks that we use our struggles to recognize harmful practices and make efforts to improve inequalities.

Similar to action research, in addition to describing the realities of women, feminist research intends to "actively to improve them" (Kirsch, 2005, p. 2163; refer also to Kirsch & Royster, 2010). Feminist theories include the understanding that research exigencies, researchers and research participants do not exist in isolation. As researchers explore their interests, develop methodologies, design studies, recruit and work with participants, feminist theory asks that they recognize that their lives and choices and their participants' lives and choices develop from their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Kirsch, 2002; Kirsch, 1993). Specifically, feminist theories as researchers to create equality in their research by

- asking research questions that acknowledge and validate participants' experience;
- collaborating with participants as much as possible so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive, and cooperative;
- analyzing how social, historical, and culture factors shape the research site as well as participants' goals, values, and experiences;

- analyzing how the researchers' identity, experience, training, and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis, and findings;
- correcting androcentric norms by calling into questions what has been considered 'normal' and what has been regarded as 'deviant';
- taking responsibility for the representation of others in research reports by assessing probably and actual effects on different audiences; and
- acknowledging the limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data, as well as alternative interpretations of that data. (Kirsch, 2002, p. 418)

FST builds upon the elements of feminist theory to create a research environment that seeks out not just inequality, but where the most marginalized voices speak. Many of the traits of feminist theory compliment action research and CHAT.

Feminist Standpoint Theory History

An offshoot of academic feminist theory, early FST followed Marxist principles; however, "from the outset, feminist standpoint theories have recognized that feminist politics demand a justification for the truth claims of feminist theory, that is, that feminist politics are necessarily epistemological;" thus, FST is and was based in the ideas "that knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints form which knowledge is produced" (Hekman, 1997, p. 342). Peter Høeg (1994) writes that true "[u]understanding is something one does best when one is on the borderline" (p. 37) and FST theory asks researchers to "take seriously the belief that marginalized voices have revelatory qualities that can effect significant social change" and that "feminist stand-point theory helps us to appreciate the corrective force of the discourse of the oppressed and overlooked" (McClish & Bacon, 2002, p. 31). Those on the margins can see the whole picture better than those at the center because "[g]roups and individuals who occupy various spaces within the matrix of oppression have varying points of view of their own and others' experiences with inequalities, which results in knowledge projects reflecting their social location within systems of power" (Walkington, 2017, p. 52). Listening to

voices from the edges gives researchers a more complete picture of activity systems of participants. RWS scholar Kirsch (1991) asks FST researchers to examine the lives of women in the academy by "uncover[ing] voices that have been unheard" (p. 17) and Casanave (2002) argues that while there are many women with access to the academy, "[i]n academic settings men more often than women" have greater access to resources, power, and prestige and that "feminist literature has documented that women find it especially difficult to get their voices heard and to have those voices regarded as authoritative" (p. 13). FST asks for researchers to seek out the inequalities in power and explore ways to rectify those imbalances.

This study uses FST to understand and express the truth of graduates' situations, but also to evaluate the "present in the service of enabling an intervention on behalf of improved states of affairs in the future: better and more complete knowing, *and* better and more humane, viability for all would-be knowers" (Houle, 2009, p. 174-75). The feminist theories utilized in this study are those that seek to create equity and inclusion. They follow calls for more equitable writing research by feminist rhetoricians like Patricia Hill Collins, Gesa E. Kirsch, bell hooks, Jacqueline J. Royster, Lori Walkington, Nancy Hartsock, Sally Miller Gearhart, Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, Starhawk, Dorothy Smith, and Cindy Griffin in their assertation that feminism is about creating spaces of equality, not tearing down one idea or gender in favor of another (Ryan & Natalle, 2001; McClish & Bacon, 2002).

Feminist Standpoint Theory in Practice

This study views writing projects as complex rhetorical situations. There is a rhetor and an intended audience and, ostensibly, the purpose of the situation is to "engage in a dialogue" with the academic community "in order to reach mutual understanding, and thus a more democratic society" (Ryan & Natalle, 2001, p. 71). Feminist rhetoric is grounded in "principles

of equality, immanent value, and self-determination and replaces patriarchal values of domination, competition, and change" (Ryan & Natalle, 2001, p.70) and invite as many voices to the conversation as are interested in being heard. Change in the academy must start "from the inside as more voices with more diverse views enter into the discussion" (Russell, 2013, p. 173) and voice their positions. Graduate writing projects are the means by which graduate students reach their audiences, be those audiences their dissertation committee, editors, or professors. Their projects' purposes vary but are usually focused on demonstrating to their audience that they are moving from student to expert and professional status. With every graduate writing project, the number of scholars in the academy increases and more voices are heard.

Feminism is about equity for all, and its purpose is to identify sites where unequal power creates suffering. The TWIG Writing Group (1996) argues that in writing, feminism must "attempt to minimize the inappropriate use of power over others; to view our lives as expressions, and products, of political and philosophical values; and to encourage and empower ourselves and others for social action and change" (p. 18). As Hekman (1997) quotes Hartsock, FST "is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women" (p. 342-3). This study does not claim that women in graduate programs are necessarily oppressed, but that women returning to school after years away have a viewpoint that is different from and less researched than those of students who have not had interruptions in their academic trajectory. Their positionalities and intersectionality provide interesting challenges and position them as part neophyte, part expert when re-entering programs that have changed, sometimes significantly, since they were last in school. These standpoints are different from the traditional graduate student and in standpoint theory, "epistemology depends on knowledge that is determined by the knower's social position,

particularly by the power relationships that structure his or her life" (McClish & Bacon, 2002, p. 28). Female graduate students returning to school are sometimes older than their professors and have years of experience but are new to whatever form academic writing has taken in their absence.

In order to better understand the experiences of the participants, I asked participants, through interviews and writing sessions, for narratives from the participants about their experiences with graduate writing. Narratives are descriptions of experience and are "a less direct, more implicit method of argument, it is well suited for rhetors who occupy the margins of culture and may lack access to more overtly argumentative modes and flora of civic and deliberative discourse. Indeed, marginalized rhetors are often directed to use narrative as a persuasive form" (McClish & Bacon, 2002, p. 34). Understanding the narratives of the participants in this study enables me as the researcher to understand their history, their activity systems, how they work within their community, what tools they find useful, and why they are seeking degrees: their standpoint. Standpoint theories ask for "explication of experience and perspective" (McClish & Bacon, 2002, p. 34).

FST asks that everyone be included, but no one be forced. Gearhart (1979) recognizes that "[t]o change other people or other entities is not in itself a violation. It is a fact of existence that we do so. The act of violence is in the intention to change another" (p.196); to force someone to participate in research, to use an editorial suggestion, or to use a writing support is a form of violence. Fleckenstein (2001) reminds researchers that as they work with participants, they must create a safe space, a particular challenge as this research attempts to accomplish two seemingly opposite objectives: enact change, but also reinforce the rules of the academic community; this research sought to be equitable in seeking many voices, but not constrain, or manipulate any

participants into accepting writing support (p.763). This project sought to include as many voices as possible by including students from across disciplines in order to suggest writing supports that are available to all who want them and but not to require or mandate any writing tools.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a methodology is popular in computer tool design, medical process design, and educational intervention designs. An activity, in this project, is a process in which the subject is engaged to achieve an object and reach a desired outcome. Subjects can be engaged in multiple activities to reach their goals, or in CHAT, their objects. The unit of measurement for CHAT is an activity system which shows the relationship between the subject, the activity of the subject, the elements that caused the exegesis of the activity, the elements that shape the activity's process, and the object or goal's relationship to the intended outcome of the activity. Subjects usually have multiple activity systems, some of which may interfere with others. For example, a woman going back to school has a student activity system wherein she is engaged in taking courses, and she has a family activity system wherein she is engaged in her role as mother and often partner. Her objects as a student are to pass courses, finish assignments, and in graduate programs, write theses or dissertations. Her outcome is graduation. The activity system is situated around a subject who, because of and in their cultural historical context, is striving towards an object. The system is couched in the participant's community which sets the rules which guide the division of labor; areas of contradiction reveal where the participant's system starts to break down and are spaces for inquiry and experiment (Caplan, 2020; Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; McNely, 2012; Lazarou, 2011; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Casanave, 2002; Koschmann, 1998; Hold & Morris, 1993). CHAT methods operate on the

theory that "potential for qualitative change" (Engeström, 2005, p. 36) exists in the tensions and contradictions of the activity system. CHAT began as a method in Russian social psychology and has evolved and expanded over the past century as a method applicable and viable in the sciences and humanities.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory History

CHAT's roots are in the work of Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky and that of his student Aleksei Leontiev. Vygotsky's work is often referred to as first generation activity theory, his student, Leontiev's work as second generation, and third generation is based on the work of Yrjö Engeström and Michael Cole and others who were interested in examining a participant's multiple activity systems. Fourth generation CHAT evolves as researchers frame their research within their participants' multiple, complex, and in-flux activity systems.

In the early decades of the 1900s, Vygotsky developed a method of studying a subject as they strove towards an object. His studies were opposed to behavioralist theories as he worked to prove that "unlike animals, human *activity* is purposeful and carried out by sets of *actions* through the use of '*tools'*, which can be physical or psychological" (Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014, p. 9). Vygotsky theorized that "tool-mediated semiotic activity transforms cognition by internalizing external cultural tools and processes" (Russell, 2013, p.167) and the foundational concept of tools as mediation arises in Vygotsky's early social psychology work via his Subject, Object, Mediating Artifact model (Caplan, 2020; Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Paré, 2014; McNely, 2012; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch, 2007; Engeström, 2005; Koschmann, 1998; Hold & Morris, 1993). The methodological limits of this model are studying Subject-Object-Artifact in isolation without taking into consideration the participant's historical cultural context.

Second generation CHAT built upon Vygotsky's work with Leontiev's expansion on the Subject, Object, Mediating Artifact model and included studying how collective actions affected individual's actions by adding to Vygotsky's activity system the elements of rules, community, and division of labor to describe "object-oriented labor activity" (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019, p.2). People's "actions are not primarily results of privately held, internalized mental representations" (Engeström, 2005, p. 90) but are derived from the social context of the individual – their culture and history. Leovtiev described "activities in hierarchal system where activities comprised actions or chains of actions, and where these actions comprised operations" (Hashim & Jones, 2007). Second generation CHAT did not study one individual's goal in isolation but took into consideration an activity system that included the community that formed the rules and in which divisions of labor occurred to reach collective goals. (Caplan, 2020; Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Aitchison, 2014; McNely, 2012; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Third generation CHAT builds on Leontiev's work by expanding his model to take into consideration a participant's competing activity systems. It is in the third generation that researchers begin taking roles as participants and guides (Feryok, 2012; Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019). Engeström (2005) argues that in order to understand the way tools mediate a participant's experience, researchers must take into consideration that the activity systems not described as part of one object's system still affect the participant's ability to navigate towards that system's desired outcomes (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; McNely, 2012; Lazarou, 2011; Engeström, 2005; Nardi, 1996).

Engeström put forth that 4th generation CHAT should consider multiple perspectives and their context as they work with their participants because "[h]uman activity is endlessly multi-faceted, mobile and rich in variations of content and form. It is perfectly understandable and

probably necessary that the theory of activity should reflect that richness and mobility" (Engeström, 2005, p.18). Society functions as a network and 4th generation CHAT asks researchers to consider how an individual activity system is affected by the other activity systems in the participant's lived life (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019; Paré, 2014; Engeström, 2005). Third generation CHAT looks at the different systems that pull on a participant, but 4th generation asks researchers to examine the participant's collaborations on institutional and interorganizational levels (McNely, 2012). Spinuzzi and Guile (2019) note that the limits of 3rd generation CHAT in "accounting for social production, peer production, and similar cases of post-bureaucratic work, cases that do not resemble traditional work with known cycles and an agreed-upon object" (p.3) can be overcome with a more flexible and inclusive purview of participants' activity systems. "Mediation" posits Engeström (2005) "by tools and signs is not merely a psychological idea. It is an idea that breaks down the Cartesian walls that isolate the individual mind from the culture and the society" (p. 25), thus CHAT methodologies can be messy. Fourth generation CHAT researchers strive to understand their participants' lives as highly complex and interweaving. Engeström (2005) imagined that "it might be useful to try and look at the society more as a multi-layered network of interconnected activity systems, and less as a pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single center of power" (p. 36). These layered systems affect how participants' experience their lives and how their tools mediate their activities within their communities.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory in Practice

One of Vygotsky's most important principles that has become central to CHAT is that people's thoughts and actions are shaped by their social experiences and cultural contexts. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) examines the relationship between human cognition and human activity (Engeström, 2005). It is our thoughts about and formed by our reality that

give rise to our actions. The consequences of our actions, the way they affect our activity systems, inform subsequent thoughts about interpreting, planning, and enacting future actions. Human activity systems arise from culturally historical contexts; thus, people's actions stem from the frameworks in which they operate. It is the expectations, reactions, punishments, and rewards of people's activity systems that inform their future actions. CHAT studies how people negotiate and change their social realities in their cultural contexts through their actions, making and using tools, and participating in communities (Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Paré, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Engeström, 2005, Casanave, 2002; Koschmann, 1998; Nardi, 1996).

To describe the connection between cognition and activity, CHAT "foregrounds the culturally embedded nature of ongoing practical activity and posits that what we think and how we think is ultimately a product of what we do" (Koschmann, 1998, p. 239; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Paré, 2014; Nardi, 1996). CHAT examines the nature of collaborative activities to understand how people function while working on projects. CHAT recognizes that activity systems are in states of constant flux and that "the human organization is a dynamic entity, fueled by the tensions between the contradictions inherent in its history of production and consumption and continuously evolving toward a number of future states" (Hold & Morris, 1993, p. 101; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Engeström, 2005) and that people, organizations and society are constantly moving towards goals or outcomes. CHAT does not ask researchers to conduct experiments in labs, but to examine the lives of their participants' complex activity systems and experiences.

This study centers the experiences of UTEP (community) graduate writers (subjects) and if/how a variety of writing supports (tools) contribute to the successful completion of writing

projects (objects) as they seek to fulfil the requirements (rules) of advanced degrees (outcomes), and what supports could be sustained or created. This study also identifies contradictions, affordances, and mediation in activity systems. Figure 1 demonstrates the construction of a simple graduate writing activity system utilizing CHAT terminology.

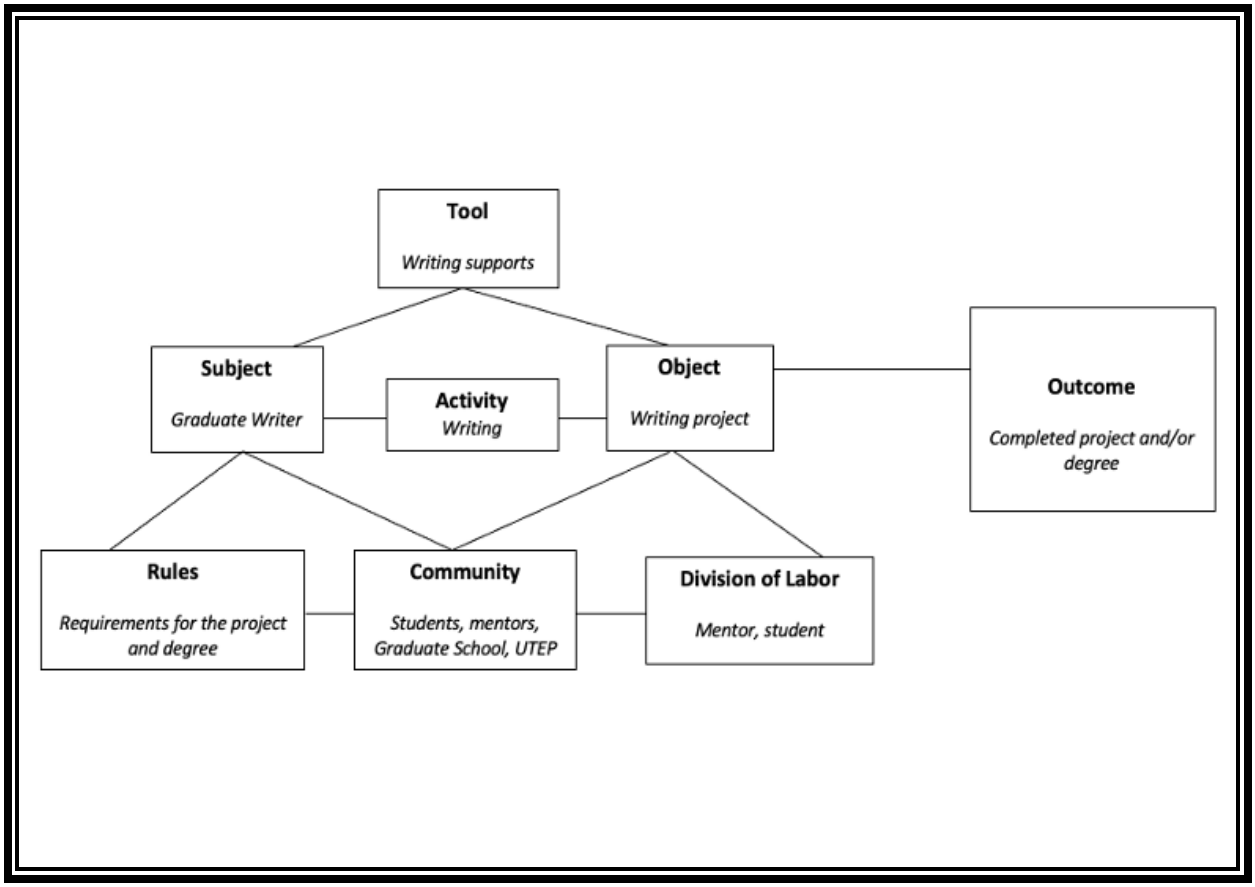

Figure 1: Graduate Student Writing Activity System

CHAT is framework or a "clarifying descriptive tool" that seeks "to understand the unity of consciousness and activity" in the context of the participants' "intentionality, history, mediation, collaboration and development in constructing consciousness" (Nardi, 1996, p. 4; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; McNely, 2012; Activity Theory-Learning Theories, 2007; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005). CHAT provides

researchers with the tools to connect what their participants do with the why they do it and then understand why they use what tools and what tools might be more effective.

One of the central tenets of CHAT is that human action is mediated by the tools we use (Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Feryok, 2012; McNely, 2012; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005, Nardi, 1996). Mediation means that relationships between people and their goals are deeply situated in their society and culture and evolve over time and through history. Consciousness develops from activities that are mediated by tools (language, other people, physical objects, technology, etc.) and thus "connect us organically and intimately to the world" (Nardi, 1996, p. 5). However, the term *mediated* connotes much more than individuals using tools. Mediation includes the kinds of tools we use for what purpose and the tools we create and "the ways we engage in activity and the ways we think about activity" (Kain & Wardle, 2019).

Cultural Historical Activity Theory Terminology

Tool. In order to analyze how writing supports can affect graduate writers, I use the CHAT term tool to refer to anything or person graduate students may employ to complete their writing projects. Hasan and Kazaluska (2014) write that "human activity is purposeful and carried out by sets of actions through the use of 'tools'" (p. 9). Tools are anything from physical instruments (hammers, computers, software) to psychological supports (training, reasoning, theories) that move the subject towards the object of the activity (Caplan, 2020; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch, 2007; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005; Engeström, 2005; Hold & Morris, 1993). In the activity system map for this study, writing supports center on language, which Hasan and Kazlauska call "the most significant tool for collaborative human activity" (9). Kain and Wardle (2019) write that "[f]or those of us interested in rhetorical

theory, the most helpful aspect of activity theory is the way it helps us see more fully all the aspects of a situation and community that influence how people use the tools of language and genre" (p. 1). Language, for the purposes of this study, is defined as "the words, their pronunciation, and the methods combining them used and understood by a community" and "a formal system of signs and symbols" which includes "rules for the formation and transformation of admissible expressions" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Engeström (2005) built his theories on the idea that "communication is an inherent aspect of all object-related activities" and that "the emergence of speech and language emphasizes the original unity of labor actions and social intercourse" (p. 23). In graduate writing, language "is probably the most complex tool of them all" (Kain and Wardle, 2019, p. 1). Language tools include verbal conversations (face-to-face and digital), written texts, text messages, emails, presentation tools like PowerPoint, comments on texts, all other language graduate students use to move towards their objects, and rules that form the genres, from course work to dissertations, of graduate projects. Continuing in the vein of language as essential, McNely (2012) asked and answered: "What mediates the everyday lived experience of contemporary individuals absent of writing and rhetoric? Almost nothing." Language is a vital tool that mediates people's social, economic, political, and cultural experiences (Paré, 2014). Situating writing supports as tools in an activity system allows researchers to observe how writing supports (tools) mediate between the subject (writer) and object (writing project) to facilitate the outcome and what supports are and might be appropriate and effective for UTEP graduate students.

Subject. CHAT focuses on human activity and the human that is acting is called the subject. The subject is the person moving towards the object to obtain the outcome (Caplan, 2020; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005; Engeström, 2005; Hold & Morris, 1993). All activity systems arise out of

"practices that have a history" and CHAT researchers, as they "study how a system works... need to consider how it came to function in a particular way" (Kain & Wardle, 2019, p.2). Researchers need to understand the subject's history, how they have arrived at graduate school which helps frame what tools work/don't work as writing supports for each individual subject. Scanlon and Issroff (2005) note that the subject uses the tools to get to the object, but it is the rules that mediate the "relationship between subject and community… The tool is anything used in the transformation process while the rules are explicit and implicit norms, conventions and social relations within a community" (p. 432). In this study, the rules are the degree requirements, set by the community (UTEP and the student's program), that the subject must fulfil in order to obtain the outcome (degree) via the object (writing project) (Lundell & Beach, 2003).

Object. Outcomes are the purpose of activities and are what happens when objects are obtained (Caplan, 2020; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Engeström, 2005; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005). Hold and Morris (1993) define objects as "modifiable ends towards which activity is directed and from which an outcome is expected" (p. 98). Tools are used by subjects to achieve objects. The permitted tools and the guidelines of the objects are regulated by the community and achieved through the division of labor aspects of the activity map. In the proposed study, object refers to writing projects graduate students must complete on their path towards their desired outcome: their degree. Writing projects vary with programs and include, but are not limited to publications, theses, dissertations, and course work requirements. This research also includes academic projects like grants, applications for further degrees (law school, medical school, PhD programs), resumes and application requirements for post degree employment as these are all writing projects that contribute to graduate students' professionalization.

Rules, Community and Division of Labor. In CHAT, the exigency of a subject using tools to achieve an object on the way to an outcome arises from the rules and division of labor of a community. The subject enters or maintains membership in the community by adhering to the community rules; the object comes into existence guided by the community's division of labor (Caplan, 2020; Kain & Wardle, 2019; Hasan & Kazlauska, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005; Engeström, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Hold & Morris, 1993). The rules, community and division of labor create the subject's social basis and "basis situates the activity in a broader context that allows us to account for the influences that shape the activity." (Kain & Wardle, 2019, p. 4; refer also to Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Engeström, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003). Hold and Morris (1993) define rules as "inherently incomplete guides for action or activity prescribed by the community" (p. 98). In the current study, the rules of graduate students' experiences are the expectations and requirements of their programs to obtain an advanced degree. The students' community is the administration of UTEP, in addition to their program's administrators, professors, advisors, and peers; people, as Hold and Morris (1993) posit, who, for the most part, "share a set of social meanings" (p. 98) about the value of writing, research, projects and advanced degrees. Division of labor delineates who in the community is responsible for upholding and fulfilling the rules (degree requirements) and derives from "the explicit and implicit organization of a community as related to the transformation process of the object into the outcome" (Scanlon & Issroff, 2005, p. 432). The division of labor in graduate programs differs from student to student and advisor to advisor and very much depends on their program's expectations of students and advisors.

Contradictions. Contradictions occur in an activity system when something in the system impedes a person's progress towards their object (Caplan, 2020; Hasan & Kazlauska,

2014; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Scanlon & Issroff, 2005; Engeström, 2005; Hold & Morris, 1993). Activity systems are not stable and as such, when contractions arise, they may "manifest themselves as problems" (Scanlon & Issroff, 2005, p. 432) but are also sites of potential development. Hasan and Kazlauska (2014) identify four salient places in an activity system that researchers need to watch carefully: ineffective tools, subject's ability/willingness to use tools, the subject's ability to achieve the object and the differences between expectations in the division of labor (p. 12).

The CHAT model assists researchers in identifying contradictions in a system. The researcher uses action research to deepen CHAT's exploration into the iterative cycle of examining, designing, implementing, and reflecting on effective tools, or in this research, various writing supports. CHAT theorist Engeström (2005) argues that a researcher should "enter actual activity systems" (p. 36) or become part of the participants' activity system to create an "analysis of the activity system" with the capability of "illuminate the underlining contradictions which give rise to those failures and innovations as if 'behind the backs' of conscious actors" (p. 32). Action research, like CHAT, "is concerned with practice, that is, doing and activity" (Nardi, 1996, p. 7) and reflection (Engeström, 2005) not merely observing. Although I had not set out to find affordances, I discovered that PhD students can be resourceful and create systems that overlap, but in positive and supportive ways. The women I interviewed and with whom I worked on projects described tools they had developed to address the contradictions in their writing systems. In the project aspect, those affordances were the foundation from which we built further tools. CHAT, deepened by action research, focuses on not just locating spaces of contradiction, but finding viable, useful solutions (Lazarou, 2011; Engeström, 2005; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Nardi, 1996; Hold & Morris, 1993).

Data Collection and Analysis

This action research study includes twelve female graduate students who identify as women and were returning to graduate school after years away from the academy. Eight of the participants were interview-only. Four participants agreed to let me work with them closely on their writing projects. I also participated in a writing group for female graduate students called Mama Bear PhDs offered for mothers who returned to the academy. The patterns and themes explored in this research examined what challenges arise for women who are returning to graduate school, how writing might manifest as a barrier, what writing supports are helpful, and what UTEP can do to support these scholars as they strive to finish their degrees.

I recruited potential participants were recruited, with IRB approval 1649448-1, from the UTEP Graduate School sponsored programs including writing retreats and writing groups. The participants were all graduate students enrolled in doctoral programs. Per COVID-19 protocols (during 2020-2021), all writing retreats and writing groups met online and recruitment consisted of the researcher volunteering during writing retreats to assist retreat participants with any sort of writing support they desire. When participants reached out to me, I assisted them in a variety of writing tasks from checking basic grammar to discussing structure to designing next steps. If the participants asked about my project, I explained my work and invited them to talk to me about their writing experiences in a loosely structured interview. I provided consent forms for the interviews and explained the content. Once the consent forms were signed, if those participants that interviewed asked for more information about working on projects with me, I provided more information. If a student asked to be part of the project aspect of the research, I asked them to sign a consent form for the writing project. If a student did not wish to be part of the writing

project aspect, I sill offered to assist and support their writing, but not include said supports as part of my research.

Project participants (participants with whom I worked beyond the interview for a semester or longer) met with me once a week, with deviations per their schedule or needs. CHAT and FST frameworks deepened the action research approach by keeping me mindful of the importance of careful listening and being cognizant of competing activity systems. As we worked together, I would suggest supports and the participant would agree or amend the idea. The support would be attempted and then reflected upon the next meeting then retooled or continued. As we worked, I talked to the participant about their challenges and successes and what supports (for example: genre analysis, editing, and goal setting) seemed to help move their project forward, what supports merited repeating, and what further supports they would like to try. I kept detailed notes of internal and external challenges manifested on a secure hard drive that was destroyed upon the completion of the research.

When working with students initially (prior to making this a formal study) I met with an assortment of masters and doctoral students whose ages ranged from 20 to 59 and included men and women. The more I worked with graduate students at writing retreats in in my writing group, the more I realized those who sought help tended to be women returning to school after time away from the academy and that their support needs and wants were different from those students who had continued from their undergrad into their graduate studies without interruption. So, while I continued to work with all graduate students who sought me out, I decided to focus on the needs of women returning to school. The Mama Bears PhD writing group was especially salient as the writing group participants had returned for their doctoral degrees after careers outside of the academy. Each woman is a mother of child(ren) of different ages, and each is pursuing a degree in

a different field. This diverse group of mothers along with the four graduate projects and eight interviews allowed me access to a rich set of UTEP graduate writing experiences.

Data Collection

Interviews

CHAT asks that data be contextualized in the history that produced it and be manageable and collectable. Engeström (2005) explains that "[h]istorical analyses must be focused on units of manageable size" and when the researcher is studying individuals, "or the individually constructed situation, history is reduced to ontogeny or biography" (p. 25). Thus, to explain how women returning to school experience writing in graduate programs, explore if writing manifests as a barrier to expected completion of graduate programs, and to ascertain what kinds of graduate-level writing supports women returning to UTEP find most helpful/least helpful, I conducted twelve semi-structured conversational interviews. Eight participants were interview-only; four were interviewed at the beginning of the project phase and then again at the conclusion. Participants were asked questions, but also encouraged to take the conversation where their experience dictated. The questions were designed to obtain background information as well as open the space for participants to talk about how writing has been a part of their lives.

Interview Questions

<u>Questions for interview-only participants and pre/post-project participant interview:</u>

Gathering quantitative information

1. What is your first language?
2. What other languages are you semi-proficient – fluent in?
3. What is your field of study?
4. How long have you been in your graduate program?
5. How many years total do you anticipate spending in your graduate program?

Gathering writing experience information

1. **When and where and what was your last writing class?**
2. **What are the writing expectations of your program?**
    a. Are you working on a writing project now?
    b. What, if any, writing supports have you used?
    c. What kind of supports would you be willing to use?
3. **Who/where do you go for help if you need writing assistance?**
    a. What do you enjoy about this support?
    b. What are some of the challenges with this support?
    c. Can you tell me a little bit more about X?
    d. You mentioned Y; how often do you use Y?
    e. Is there anything you would like to share with me about your support experience?
4. **What campus writing resources do you consider reliable?**
    a. What have they done to earn your trust?
5. **Are there any campus writing resources you consider unreliable?**
    a. Please tell me about the experience(s) that led you to mistrust the support.

Tell me about

1. **Have you ever had a really positive writing experience?**
    a. What made that experience really positive?
    b. What would have made it even better?
2. **If you have ever had challenging experiences with writing?**
    a. Can you talk about that?
    b. What did help?
    c. What would have helped?

Post-project additional questions

1. What did you find least useful in our interactions on your project?
2. What did you find most useful?
3. If you were to design a writing support program for those that follow, what elements would you consider essential?

Projects

In addition to interviews, this research also included four projects with graduate women who were returning to the academy and working on graduate writing projects. I met with the participants weekly, or as needed, to set writing goals, report on accomplishments, and discuss what tools the participant found effective and/or wanted for the next stage of their work. I interviewed each participant utilizing the above questions before the collaboration began and again at the conclusion of the semester wherein the participant worked with the researcher. During regular support sessions (usually weekly), action research methods enriched with CHAT centered the work done with the participant as co-operative and iterative. The phases for the projects were as follows:

1. Meet and discuss participant's writing progress
2. Compare progress to participant's goals
3. Ascertain what supports are helping and what would be appropriate and motivating for the next stage of the project.
4. Decide on supports and set goals for the next week

After these support sessions, I took detailed notes about the process and wrote down any salient observations.

The intake and exit interviews as well as my notes from support sessions serve as data to understand, analyze, and describe the writing experiences of women returning to attend graduate programs. Each participant chose their own pseudonym and the phrasing of their age. Table 1 includes each participant's pseudonym, age, classification (interview or project), and the duration of either the interview or the number of sessions the researcher and participant met.

Mama Bear PhD Writing Group

In the Fall semester of 2020, I joined the UTEP Graduate School's Mama Bear PhD Writing Group comprising four members who were all mothers returning to the academy as graduate students. Although members of the group were also members of the research, I researcher focused my observations on specific elements of writing groups that contribute to members' successes and factors that determine a group's success and perpetuation or failure.

Table 1: Participant Pseudonyms, Ages, Classifications, Sessions/Interview Duration.

Pseudonym	Age	Interview/Project	Number of Sessions	Duration of interview
Yun Lin	41	Interview		45:50 min
Brisa Solaris	50s	Interview		51:48 min
Mena	38	Interview		105:19 min
Maria Joseph	37	Interview		44:24 min
Catherine Acosta	30s	Interview		55:39 min
Maria Martinez	42	Interview		45:35 min
Muktaa	30s	Interview		57:40 min
Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH)	30s	Interview		24:08 min
				Total Session Hours
Violet UV	34	Project	14 sessions	160 hours
Bernadette Volkov	59	Project	15 sessions	200 hours
Jessica Watkins	50s	Project	Individual: 15 Writing Group: 5	170 hours
Nora DeJohn	49	Project	65 sessions	700 hours

Data Analysis

Interviews

To analyze each interview, I created a CHAT map for each participant. Kain and Wardle (2019) write that activity theory can help the researcher "more fully understand the 'context' of a community and its tools" through the terminology and "by providing a diagram outlining the important elements and their relationships" (p. 5). I created layers of activity systems for each participant. Fig. 1 is representative of a writing activity system. However, every graduate student has more activity systems than just their writing projects, so, utilizing the information from the interviews and the CHAT concept that each participant has multiple activity systems, the researcher layered the writing activity system with other systems the interviewee spoke of (family, work, friends, pandemic issues, health, etc.). Figure 2 is an example of Mena's complex activity systems. She is pursuing a doctoral degree in philosophy as well as seeking tenure in a local community college. Her activity systems overlap and can compete for Mena's attention; however, she has found affordances in her academic communities that support her writing and her progress towards her desired outcomes.

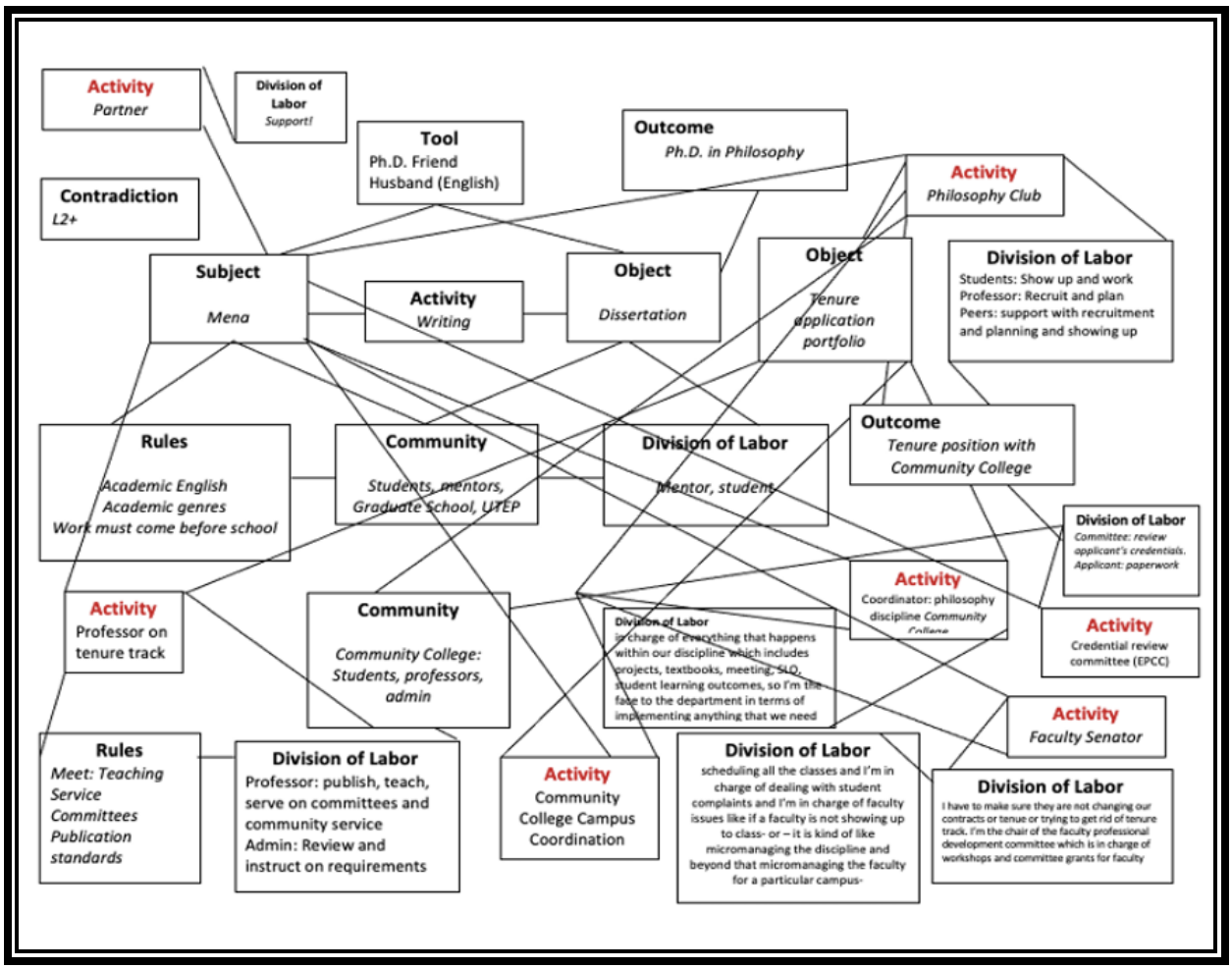

Figure 2: Mena's Activity System CHAT Map.

After conducting and transcribing all interviews, I coded them utilizing CHAT terms (Subject, Tools, Contradictions, Community, Rules, Division of Labor, Objects, and Outcomes). The CHAT charts and themes from the researcher's notes were analyzed looking for the specific kinds of tools that the participants used and why/how those tools either worked or failed. Tool evaluation took into consideration what composition tasks they were supposed to support and how the tools the participants responded to change over time and how they might change in the future. Although not originally intended, the CHAT maps also revealed affordances as participants found creative approaches to support their education and balance their other responsibilities.

I also tracked themes that repeated in all or many of the graduate writers' experiences. These themes include challenges, effective and not effective supports, successes, positive writing experiences, negative writing experiences, advisor relationships, descriptions of desired supports, etc. I analyzed the interviews and field notes again, looking specifically for answers to the study's research questions: How do women returning to school experience writing in graduate programs and if writing manifests as a barrier to expected completion of graduate programs? These charts and themes also ascertain what kinds of graduate-level writing supports women returning to UTEP find most helpful/least helpful.

Project Participants

As I worked with each participant, I (sharing my observations with them at specific points) added elements and activity systems to the participant's chart as they became apparent and manifested in the participant's conversations and (re)scheduled sessions. I asked questions but tried not to be intrusive. If other activity systems interfered with writing, I noted these systems. If writing interfered with other systems or slowed down program progress, I especially noted these issues. I also tracked themes that repeated in graduate writers' experiences across projects and interviews. These themes include challenges, effective and not effective supports, successes, positive writing experiences, negative writing experiences, advisor relationships, etc. The participant's CHAT chart was completed with the final exit interview. I analyzed CHAT charts and themes from my notes looking for the specific kinds of tools that the participants used and why/how those tools either worked or failed. Tool evaluation took into consideration what composition tasks they were supposed to support and how the tools the participants responded to change over time and how they might change in the future. Although not originally intended, the

CHAT maps also revealed affordances as participants found creative approaches to support their education and balance their other responsibilities.

I also tracked themes that repeated in all or many of the graduate writers' experiences, interview, and project. These themes include challenges, effective and not effective supports, successes, positive writing experiences, negative writing experiences, advisor relationships, descriptions of desired supports, etc. I analyzed the interviews and notes again, looking specifically for answers to the study's research questions: How do women returning to school experience writing in graduate programs and how does writing manifests as a barrier to expected completion of graduate programs? These charts and themes also ascertain what kinds of graduate-level writing supports women returning to UTEP find most helpful/least helpful.

Validation

FST reminds the researcher that the authentic voice of the participant is the most significant data in the research and is not to be coerced or misrepresented. I offered all participants an opportunity to read the transcripts of their interviews, read the study findings, and respond to both in writing. I participants emailed transcripts of our interviews and invited to make alterations where they saw fit. Those who asked for modifications to their interviews, emailed the phrasing or information they wanted added or changed. Brisa Solaris and Bernadette Volkov requested edits that clarified their intent and removed identifying information. The remainder of the participants were satisfied that the transcript reflected their experiences.

At the conclusion of the research and data analysis, I emailed participants the write-up that analyzed their experiences in the context of the study's research questions and invited them to make alterations where they saw fit. Those who asked for modifications emailed the phrasing or information they wanted added or changed to accurately describe their situations. If the participant

emailed a request for a change, the change was made in exact accordance with their request. Yun Lin, Bernadette Volkov, Catherine Acosta, and LRRH, requested edits that removed identifying information and clarified their intent. The remainder of the participants were satisfied that the analysis reflected their experiences.

Limitations

Human Limitations

The activity system of a graduate student may seem straightforward; however, there are multiple factors that complicate the system. CHAT (generations 1-3) has been critiqued for over-simplifying complex, networked systems. Fourth generation CHAT asks researchers to look at not just one activity system, but the multiple activity systems of the subject. For example, my participant may be the subject in their graduate education, but at home they play a different part in the community, rules, object etc. and their work system may clash with their graduate system. As an outsider, it is very difficult to understand a person's entire set of activity systems; even the participant may not be entirely aware of how different aspects of their lives form competing systems (Lundell & Beach, 2003). Participants' many activity systems include material/nonhuman actors that may problematize their graduate system: finances, access to health care, time constraints, living situation, technology, etc. FST addresses many of these issues by listening not just to a variety of voices but aims to bring to the forefront as many of an individual's intersectionality as they are willing to share.

Sample Limitations

The most salient limitations of this study are the number of graduate students at UTEP, the time limit of this study, and my limits as a researcher to work with a large population. UTEP hosts over three thousand masters and PhD students, all of whom must complete significant

writing projects (publications, theses, dissertations etc.) in order to graduate. There are many UTEP graduate students who are women returning to the academy after years away; time factors and access limitations prevent me from hearing the stories of each woman. Each returning female graduate student does embody a number of intersectionalities and, unfortunately, I was not able to work with all of them in order to let every voice be heard.

My recruiting was through UTEP writing support programs, which means my sample will be those who are already seeking assistance with projects and will exclude those who are not attending the same writer's retreats and programs as I am. FST asks researchers to find the most marginalized participants and while I will actively recruit students who embody factors that statistically hinder their prospects for graduation, students who are not interested in my support will not join my study and I will not be able to gain insight via their participation. Although I was not able to recruit every female returning graduate student at UTEP, I was able to work very closely on six graduate projects that offered insight to the graduate writing experience.

My sample size, compared to the number of UTEP graduate students, is small but significant. This study sought societal significance over statistics by focusing on individuals (Small, 2009, p. 20) and although one graduate student cannot represent an entire institution, "individuals may be able to represent their department" (Pinkert, 2020, p. 24) and provide insight to the writing expectations compared to the writing supports of departments across UTEP. My participants came from programs across the sciences, including engineering and chemistry, and humanities programs like philosophy and history. I worked very closely with them and was able to glean "a more finely grained view of the nonlinear and dynamic nature of development" which is viable data because "individual development marks the parameters within which generality can be claimed" (Feryok, 2012, p. 105). The struggles my participants encountered are products of

their unique circumstances; however, “We need to know how individuals develop in specific contests in order to know what is possible for development in general” (p. 105). By studying these graduate students closely, I was able to see the range of their challenges and how writing competed with other activity systems and how tools like writing supports can support them as they navigate their graduate experience. In this sense, the CHAT methodology also has limitations. Although 4th Generation CHAT accounts for cultural and historical factors and for multiple activity systems, it is important to acknowledge that participants’ systems are expansive and messy beyond the scope of this study. The CHAT framework allows one to stabilize a system “for now,” which creates useful but artificial boundaries around a subject of study. In this sense, FST and action research frameworks offered my data collection and analysis a complementary depth and reflexivity.

Researcher Positionality

My research positionality includes high school teacher, community college professor and university graduate student. I have been teaching EPCC Dual Credit classes at Burges High School for almost four years, English at the high school level for almost sixteen years and I have been tutoring English since I was fourteen. My concern with the validity of my research comes from my perspective of both writing teacher and writing student. I have been tutoring graduate students for five years and have seen that writing supports like retreats, classes, writing centers, assigned tutors etc. have worked for some, and have not worked for others. My concern in this study was that I may have preconceived ideas about what supports do/should work and what do not. However, Ellen Cushman (1998, 1999, 2002), Canagarajah (2012) and Wilson (2008) advocate that when researchers become part of the community they are studying, their perspectives are enriched, rather than clouded. As a student, I was able to listen to my

participants and hear what actually worked for them and as a guide, I listened more openly to their reflections and descriptions of what supports could and could not help them.

A pertinent limitation is that I have biases, agendas, and interests. These leanings color my research and mean that I will never fully know my participants' views and lives even as I work with them closely. My proposed studies contain myriad opportunities for language colonization; however, with an awareness of my own biases and proclivities, my proposed studies also offer myriad opportunities to facilitate the success of my participants. As a Ph.D. student in UTEP's RWS program, I see myself as a person in a position to guide graduate students in learning to write effectively for industry and academy. However, Ríos (2015) asks that I look at my students first and see the cultures I might be trampling on with my strict academic English grammar laws and narrow assumptions about what my participants need. Ríos (2015) writes that as researchers, "[i]nstead of assuming that our disciplinary standards define our commitment to communities, we might consider how our commitment to communities challenges our disciplinary norms" (63). Ríos's advice reminds me that I need to respect the diverse cultures of UTEP graduate students. To become more self-aware and hold my work under revealing critiques, I work on inclusion through FST theory and practice empathetic listening, and I follow the principles of action research, CHAT and FST to constantly problematize my position and be open to the differences in my participants' situations.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology study chosen for this action research study as well as explained the data collection and analysis procedures. This study used semi-structured interviews and action research CHAT projects framed in FST as primary data sources. I also participated in a UTEP Graduate School writing group.

This study's methodological approach provided the me an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the writing challenges, frustrations, and triumphs of a unique demographic. As I conducted the interviews, I was able to glimpse into the complex lives – thanks to Zoom, literally and metaphorically- of women whose graduate experience intersects with two-year-olds, disabled adult children, husbands, jobs, track teams and a number of other activity systems that make going back to school, especially graduate school, an adventure. Working on projects utilizing action research, CHAT and FST allowed me to become part of the activity systems of my participants and experience with them their frustrations, work with them to overcome trials, and celebrate their wins.

In the next chapter, I answer Research Questions One and Two by exploring, in-depth the writing experiences of one project-participant juxtaposed with other participants. Chapter 4 will posit that while participants have challenges with writing that can slow their academic trajectories, they also find affordances that help them inch towards the graduation finish line including peer supports.

Chapter 4

Findings: Activity Systems: Mothers, Partners, Daughters, Grandmothers, Coaches, Students, Teachers, then (hopefully) Writers

This chapter presents my study findings and using the lens of CHAT and FST answers Research Questions One and Two which address (1) the ways writing manifests as a barrier to graduate program completion for participants, and (2) what tools or supports participants find helpful, which they do not find helpful, and why. This chapter foregrounds Nora DeJohn's activity system and makes correlations between her experiences and those of other participants. The findings in this chapter posit that while participants have challenges with writing that can slow their academic trajectories, they also find affordances that help them inch towards the graduation finish line.

CHAT'ing about Participants' Activity Systems

As The CHAT framework operates on the theory that "potential for qualitative change" (Engeström, 2005, p. 36) exists in the tensions and contradictions of the activity system. Based on this premise, I listened for tensions and contradictions in my participants' systems to better understand the ways tools, communities, and rules affect the writing progress of my participants. The desired outcome, or purpose, for all of my participants' writing systems, is the completion of their degree; however, they all have other activity systems with high-value outcomes that take time and attention away from their writing activity system objects, the writing projects that must be completed before they can graduate.

In this research, I used CHAT maps to situate graduate students' writing activity systems in context with their diverse and myriad activity systems. For example, each participant is a caregiver and/or partner with priorities that often must come before their writing and they have

had to find ways to be partners, mothers, employees, in addition to scholars. Their professional and personal responsibilities often exceed the responsibilities of their younger academic peers and thus they have less time and energy to invest in their education (Blazer & DeCapua, 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Maher, 2014; Lee, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Casanave, 2010; Casanave, 2002). As I studied my participants' activity systems, I saw mothers who brought in members of other activity systems to care for their children while they wrote, many of the participants joined Graduate School Writing Retreats via digital platforms (their children often did as well) to socialize and carve out time to write, and I saw many of these determined women turn to each other for support, direction, and validation when their spirits lagged behind their stalled writing. I discovered that in addition to tensions, contradictions, and competing demands on resources, participants frequently turned contradictions into affordances by assembling their own activity system tools to facilitate their projects and help them to balance the demands of their competing activity systems.

Case Example: Nora DeJohn

Nora DeJohn has been in her history humanities doctoral program, full-time, since 2011; however, her dissertation progress was almost nonexistent when I met her in an online writing retreat in the early Fall of 2020. During the retreat, she asked me to look at a few paragraphs she had written as an introduction to her project. I sent her feedback, some in the form of grammar edits, but even more so in the form of questions about the content and organization of what she had written. The question approach appealed to her, and she reached out to take part in the interview and then work on her dissertation as a project for this research. We met on Zoom 65 times over the course of two semesters for a total of over 700 hours. As of Fall 2021, the first draft of her dissertation is in its final stages, and she now hopes to graduate in the Fall of 2022.

Her graduate writing experiences include challenges of a long-distance student and of a mother with young children who has a partner busy with their own career in addition to low writing self-efficacy. Her activity systems situate her as a marginalized student who is statistically less likely to graduate (Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Wollast et al., 2018; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Russell, 2013; Woldfsberger, 2014; Casanave, 2002; Baker, 1998; Aronson & Swanson, 1991) and thus, her experiences can inform ideas for writing tools for all graduate students.

Nora DeJohn, whom I will call Nora in this chapter, lives in a different part of the country where severe weather disruptions are not unusual. She is a doctoral candidate. Nora's CHAT map in Figure X shows the tensions or contradictions between her competing activity systems: family, coaching, working, and her own personal care. She explained that her family must always come first, and she does not have much social support from the university.

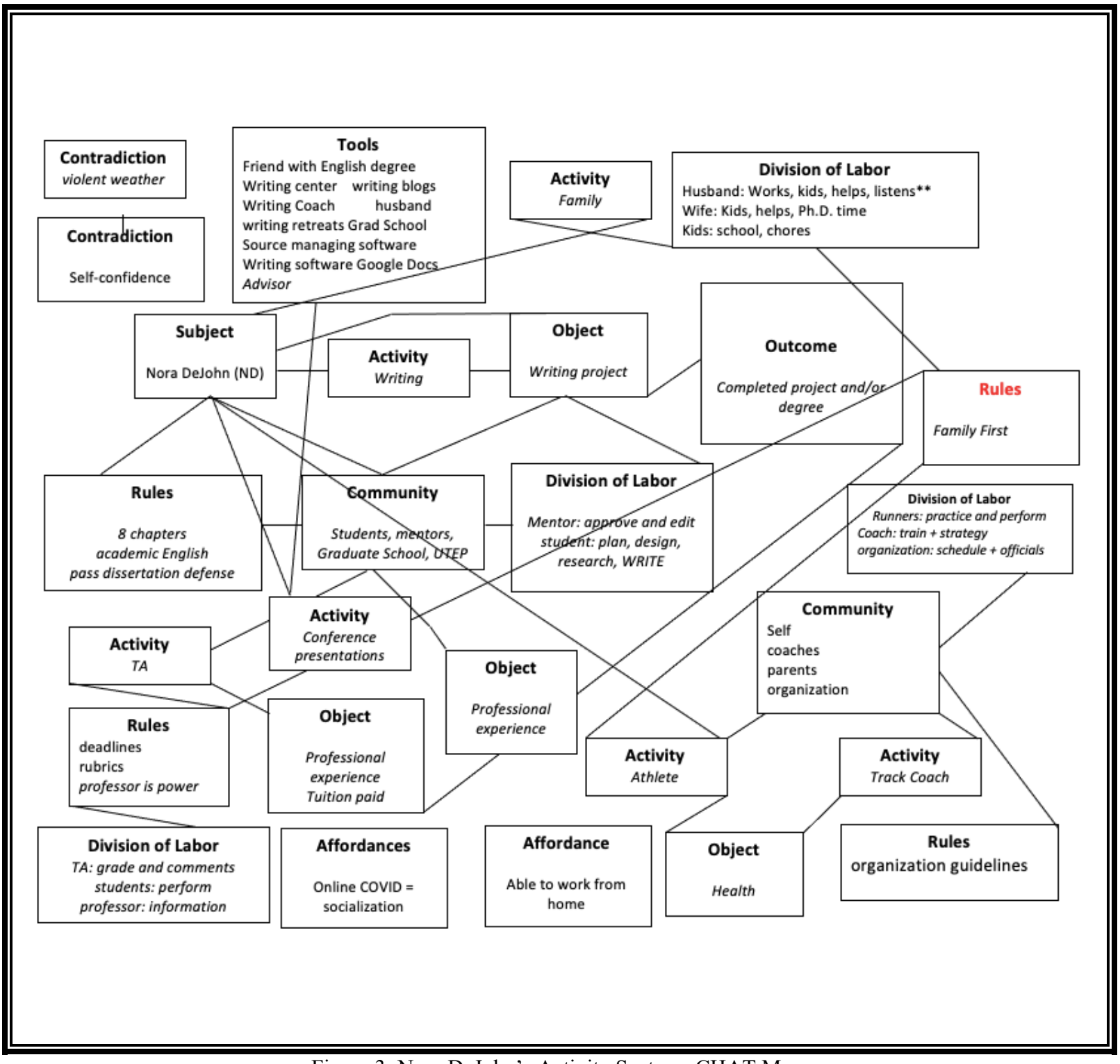

Figure 3: Nora DeJohn's Activity Systems CHAT Map.

In addition to her writing, Nora's other activity systems include her work as a teaching assistant (TA), a spouse who works in the medical field, three young children, volunteering as a private high school track coach, a few pets, and a rigorous fitness regimen. As a long-distance student, she does not have much access to the social aspect of her department. Her UTEP community is limited to her advisor and the professors for whom she works as a TA. Her responsibility as a TA is mostly online grading, and she has very little contact with her students or the professor for whom she works. Her current advisor is, as she describes, "pretty hands-off;" although, in Spring 2021, after Nora and I worked on ways she could advocate for herself like asking for meetings with specific and articulated agendas, her advisor began meeting with her more regularly and more productively.

Similar to Nora, other participants also prioritized their families and employment systems before their writing systems. Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) graduate students, including LRRH, Violet UV, Jessica Watkins, and Maria Martinez, are compelled to prioritize their experiment and research activity systems over their writing activity systems, which can significantly slow writing project progress. Violet UV's data collection process is dependent on weather phenomena and when circumstances are ideal, all other activity systems must be suspended. Violet UV also works in a university science lab, mentors incoming PhD students, is a teaching assistant, presents at conferences, has several pets, and is in a relationship with someone who has children. At the time of this study, she was working on an article that will become a chapter of her dissertation. Because of her competing systems, we had to reschedule meetings eight times during the Spring 2021 semester; we were able to meet fourteen times to work on a manuscript for publication that will become a chapter in her dissertation.

Producing Objects on the Way to Productive Outcomes

Nora's writing system object is the completion of her dissertation so she can move forward to defending her work and then, hopefully, graduate - her desired outcome. After she completes her degree, she wants to, at the time of this research, become a university professor. I became a tool in her writing activity system by planning to meet with her at least once a week. We actually met much more often, either to talk out one of her ideas, check a few sentences, or help her organize the research she was gathering. Nora's object, her dissertation, had not progressed much when I started working with her and she was determined, but struggling to focus on her writing activity system and move towards her object. Each of the twelve participants' academic objects varied and their objects included course papers, presentations, portfolios, proposals, dissertations, publications, IRB protocols, and oral defenses. Table 2 itemizes the projects/objects of participants' writing activity systems at the time of this research.

Table 2: Participants and their Writing Activity System Objects

Participant	Writing Activity System Object
Yun Lin	Portfolio
Brisa Solaris	Dissertation
Mena	Portfolio
Maria Joseph	Portfolio
Catherine Acosta	Portfolio
Maria Martinez	Dissertation

Muktaa	Dissertation
LRRH	Dissertation Proposal
Violet UV	Publication
Bernadette Volkov	Dissertation Proposal
Nora DeJohn	Dissertation

Going back to graduate programs after time away from academia is not easy. Although the participants' objects are the same for all students in their disciplines, their challenges can meet and exceed those of their younger peers (Wollast et al., 2018; Baker, 1998). For example, Brisa Solaris found it "hard when you are older, and you go back because of the baggage that you have." Mena also found that it was "not easy to come back to school" after time away tending to her sick father. Nora frequently spoke of being discouraged because schoolwork took time away from her family and personal goals, but she enjoys being a scholar and, since many of UTEP's programs moved online as COVID-19 precautions, she has been able to overcome some of her barriers by reaching out to UTEP for resources. Before COVID-19 precautions moved programs and classes online, Nora's only academic contact was her advisor and whichever professor took her on as a TA for the semester. During the pandemic, she joined Graduate School Writing Retreats and made more efforts to meet with peers and professors on digital platforms which gave her a higher degree of social interaction

Writing Barriers and Related Contradictions

Undermining Writing Progress

Nora's struggles with writing have drawn her dissertation out over almost eight years. Research indicates that the longer a student is in a graduate program, the more likely they are to drop out (Holmes et al., 2018; Caruth, 2015; Council of Graduate Schools, 2015; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Moxley, 2001; Bair & Haworth, 1999) with the highest rates of attrition at the apparently not enviable all-but-the-dissertation stage (Lundell & Beach, 2003). Nora is no exception and while our sessions usually end with increased motivation and enthusiasm, they usually begin with some frustration over her challenges, both in her writing activity system and with the activity systems that pull her away from her writing.

As a doctoral candidate moving through the dissertation process, Nora explained that she feels like her department is not preparing her for a job, much less teaching the skills she needs to write her dissertation. In several of our conversations, she worried about failure and felt like her professors expect her to "just know how to write." Several of Nora's writing experiences with instructors and advisors throughout her educational career have been, as she describes, traumatizing. In a writing class she had during her undergraduate degree in 1998, she remembers vividly her professor asking her if "I had a learning disability. And I swear, to god, she did. She brought me into her office, and she asked me if I had a disability and that I should be tested." This demoralizing experience did not deter Nora from finishing her undergraduate degree then pursuing a master's degree and then a PhD, but her lack of confidence in her writing has and does slow her progress.

Over her several years in her doctoral program, Nora has changed dissertation chairs three times due to writing frustrations and the length of time she has been in her dissertation

phase. She knows the adviser turnover is part of the process and does not have any bitterness towards previous advisors. Her current adviser is supportive; however, she explained that some of their conversations leave her wondering if the writing process is worth the academic collateral of the degree.

> My director has told me a dozen times- when [adviser] gets frustrated with me- I don't think necessarily me. [...] with graduate student complaints -which I'm sure a lot of them are ridiculous- but [my adviser] had this attitude that: Well, it sucked for me and it's going to suck for you.

Sometimes a perceived inherent ethos of suffering can demoralize graduate writers and slow their progress. Another of Nora's previous professors further crippled her confidence and morale with comments about her writing weaknesses.

> So, [this professor] graduated from [an elite institution] so [that attitude comes through] like: "Today is the day you need to change your writing." I was so many things. I was mortified. I was like: I'm in a PhD program and you are telling me this now! So, you know, it helped me for that. There were a lot of things, you know, I needed to work on my writing, so I did. But the lack of confidence is still there. I don't know if it will ever go away.

Nora recognizes that the professors were probably trying to guide her and help her understand where her academic weaknesses are; however, these experiences with experts in her field left her

with lowered writing confidence and expectations that included an understanding that writing is a painful and nearly impossible process.

One of the memories that Nora shared about her graduate coursework was the egos of other students on display. She remembers the competitive nature of her cohort and of her peers frequently boasting about their academic accomplishments. When it came to writing, although conversations never lingered over the technical aspects, the students in her cohort "gave the impression that they were good writers, that they were sophisticated writers," which led to Nora feeling more insecure about her writing abilities.

> I mean, I think it is not only the circumstance of my discipline that they don't teach writing, but I don't think ever, I don't think there is a program that exists that includes a writing component. They ultimately assume you are able to write because you are very smart and able to get into this program and everybody who can think can – can- you know- can communicate their ideas through writing perfectly, and that's not true. And so, that's annoying to me. And so- like I've said, first myself- I think was the largest barrier and second, my program not having that option to help- like why didn't they know about you! I know there are other students in my program that are struggling the same way and even my dissertation director would refer to another PhD student – [my director] would say to me: "[That student's] writing was just terrible." And I would say to myself, well, what did you do to help him?

Nora has often felt unsupported in her writing ventures and feels that professors in her department do not always have the time or willingness to provide direct writing instruction. As

we worked together, I observed that Nora thrives on collecting evidence and learning, but she is hard to pin down to actual writing even though she is under pressure to finish. While she feels her department will not drop her from her program, she also feels anxiety because she has been in the program for several years.

Nora is under pressure to finish her degree both by the university and at home. She has remarked more than once that her spouse and kids want her "to hurry up" and finish. That pressure does not help as the elements of scholarship that come together in a dissertation can be daunting even for someone who has full confidence in their writing abilities and plenty of time to write; Nora's low confidence exasperates her frustration with the self-paced nature and ambiguity of the dissertation writing process. She reflects: "So my dissertation has been the most challenging experience. And um. I wonder if it's because they are my ideas. Course work, I think, is about everyone else's ideas." In course work, Nora was able to read and interpret, based on her reading, and write papers without the level of anxiety she is experiencing as she pieces together her research and explores her ability to make and support her original claims.

The Pressures of Premature Experts

In It can be emotionally taxing when a doctoral candidate believes they must already be an expert to be validated as an academic, thus graduate writers may feel pressure to appear as authorities when they are not – yet (Russell, 2013; Hjortshoj, 2010). They may think that their professors expect them to already have mastered academic research and writing skills; thus, they may be reluctant to admit to knowledge gaps and therefore reluctant to ask for support (Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Thesen, 2014; Maher, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Casanave, 2002). As a PhD candidate, Nora feels that she should be an expert and can become embarrassed if she finds she does not know something. Because she needed to fill a knowledge gap, Nora

reached out to a mentor who provided her with a list of sources that she felt she should have known and berated herself in one of our sessions. It took several minutes of deep listening then more minutes of reassuring her before she could continue with our session.

The fear of criticism and failure can manifest in difficulty starting and persisting through projects and several of my participants found that they employed avoidance techniques like prioritizing other important (or not) activity systems. Nora was not the only participant who struggled writing self-efficacy; my L2+ writers report they have a hard time starting a project because they worry about the criticism their language may incur. LRRH, Mutkaa, Brisa, Mena, and Yun Lin in particular expressed frustrations when their ideas were criticized for the language instead of acknowledging their academic merit. Nora, Violet UV, and Jessica Watkins spoke of using continuous research to ensure they were making valid claims and understanding complex material, but they also found that tangential research manifested as a welcome distraction from risky writing. For researchers, often the experiment or archival research is more exciting than writing up the analysis and for students transitioning to experts, the temptation to continuously address doubts about their information by researching can slow down if not stall the writing process, sometimes for years. My CHAT maps pointed to this contradiction in my participants' writing activity map and we took time to empower their mindfulness in becoming aware of their avoidance techniques and revive their motivation by setting goals to refocus on writing goals as priorities. Nora responded well to our focus and refocusing of her goals.

Unfortunately, in Mena's case, receiving feedback from her advisor was incredibly stressful because that feedback meant her version was not adequate which nibbled at Mena's sense of self-efficacy and added the stress of new revisions and deadlines to Mena's already hectic activity systems. In Catherine Acosta and Brisa Solaris' experience, the mentor/mentee

relationship could feel too hierarchical to be productive. Several of the STEM writers reported that they felt their advisor would help them with technical issues but should not be burdened with requests for extensive editing or revision. Because their initial advisor(s) did not work out for a variety of reasons which included personality conflicts, time constraints, and research interests, Nora, Catherine, Bernadette, and Mukta chose to change their dissertation advisors one or more times. These setbacks with their advisors were emotionally challenging because they worried about losing credibility with, and thus support from, the professors in their program and they became concerned about their ability to finish their degree and these worries slowed their writing progress.

Writing, Language Challenges, and Unrealistic Expectations

Like Nora, many participants in this study have had unpleasant writing experiences that potentially slow their progress. Nora's experiences with negative professors and criticism of her writing still cause her to hesitate to begin and then to question everything she writes. For Mena, the writing "is a nightmare" because she is used to being a writing expert in journalism but now must learn entirely new genres. Even STEM graduate students must write extensively, and in many doctoral programs, as much as if not more than the humanities students. Often humanities programs require publication submissions for their candidacy portfolios; however, STEM doctoral writers are, in Violet UV, Maria Martinez, Jessica Watkins, and LRRH's programs, required to publish three or more articles to graduate and to find viable post-graduation employment in their field. Publication mandates, academic priorities, health issues, language challenges, the difference between explicit instruction offered and standards expected, the sometimes-unrealistic expectations on the part of the student, and the division of labor in the mentor/mentee relationship manifested as contradictions in writing activity systems that sometimes became barriers to timely completion of degree plans. Nora's struggles with writing have drawn her dissertation out over

almost eight years. Research indicates that the longer a student is in a graduate program, the more likely they are to drop out (Holmes et al., 2018; Caruth, 2015; Council of Graduate Schools, 2015; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014; Lundell & Beach, 2003; Moxley, 2001; Bair & Haworth, 1999) with the highest rates of attrition at the apparently not enviable all-but-the-dissertation stage (Lundell & Beach, 2003). Nora is no exception and while our sessions usually end with increased motivation and enthusiasm, they usually begin with some frustration over her challenges, both in her writing activity system and with the activity systems that pull her away from her writing.

Affordances for Writing Projects

Class Acts

Nora's demoralizing experience in a writing class did not facilitate her writing progress; however, several participants did have positive writing experiences in classes designed to prepare them for their graduate writing objects. The education graduate students and Maria Martinez in STEM reflected positively on courses that included clear and specific writing instructions that prepared them for doctoral writing. Violet UV spoke of a pre-doctoral writing class she took that taught her the essentials of outlining which have carried her through her doctoral writing journey. Those classes were instrumental in building their confidence as well as facilitating their understanding of doctoral genres. Although she did not take classes specific to writing, Nora utilized a variety of UTEP tools found in the Graduate School, UTEP Writing Center, and found technological supports to help her organize her research and start her writing.

The Graduate School: Writing Retreats and Accountability

The Graduate School Writing Retreats have been instrumental in helping Nora carve out time and space to write, especially since COVID precautions moved those programs online. They have also increased Nora's ability to socialize with peers and find peer mentors. Nora's

first request of me at a Graduate School Writing Retreat was to explain how to make writing more sophisticated. Her advisor's feedback asked her to adjust her writing style and she was not sure what or how to change. The writing retreats often give writers a chance to share their work with people outside of their field and sometimes, as Violet UV points out, it is good to have opportunities to explain one's work to someone who is not fluent in the field jargon because doing so forces the writer to break down and clarify their ideas. Nora has frequently found that my inexperience in her field actually forces her to explain more clearly her ideas, which in turn makes her think more clearly about her writing. She also finds the writing retreats create an accountability structure that motivates her to use her time well.

Another motivating accountability measure the Graduate School has taken is asking doctoral students to articulate in a document, with their advisor, their short and long terms goals. After receiving an email requesting her goals, Nora reported:

> So, I guess the graduate school is monitoring – I guess that's the word- They're like: Hey you need to finish your PhD! Ok, I'm on that, these are my goals. So probably that is – I never really felt like- and I still do not feel like it's um, a burden or like – they are monitoring what I'm doing or how dare they put pressure on me – or anything like that- I never did and I still don't feel - if anything I find it to be useful because it lights a fire under my ass. You know if I'm not doing it then they are going to do it and that's cool; I'm fine with it.

Rather than seeing the Graduate School's inquiry as a threat, Nora recognized the request as a motivating tool that could help her move forward and meet her writing project goals.

Accountability from many sources in a doctoral program can be motivating especially as the work becomes self-directed and deadlines become much more flexible during the dissertation stage.

University Writing Center and Library

Nora was one of the few participants who has had a positive experience with the UTEP Writing Center. For Nora, the most effective writing supports have been professors and people that could give her specific, productive, and instructive feedback. She remembers sending work to an English department-sponsored program that did edits and found some of their feedback helpful; however, in addition to grammar edits, she wanted instruction that might help her avoid repeating errors and more assistance with writing elements like structure, argumentation, and logic flow. Nora found the graduate tutor in the University Writing Center helpful because they were able to give her instruction in addition to corrections and edits. Nora wants to learn how to think and write like an expert in her field because she knows that writing is what will carry her from her student status to being a voice deemed worthy to be heard in the important conversations in her field.

In order to join the salient conversations in their field, one must know the acceptable genres and what is being said in those conversations. Nora and I were able to obtain several mentor texts by contacting the research librarian who centered her humanities field and asking for dissertations that were similar in topic to hers; they had three full dissertations back to us within hours. We discovered that the UTEP Library offers access, instruction, and software for all students to utilize for research organization. Several participants' coursework introduced them to research organizers sponsored and supported by the library like RefWorks and Mendeley. Several of them still used those platforms to collect, annotate, organize, and cite their sources.

The research librarians will also assist students in accessing hard-to-find articles and other resources.

Digital Tools

Dissertations in Nora's department necessitate locating, organizing, annotating, and analyzing primary and secondary sources as well as organizing drafts of chapters and tracking pieces of chapters. Digital writing supports that have facilitated Nora's writing are software programs that help her sort, store, search and annotate her primary and secondary resources. Her time complications necessitated a platform that could be reached when either of us was available, so we started using Google Docs for real-time writing and editing. She has had success using the platform to organize, plan and share her work with her advisor and me. In addition to taking digital notes during our weekly meetings, Nora has started recording our Zoom sessions so she can play back our conversations and listen to herself articulate her ideas, as well as remember the advice and suggestions (and bad jokes) I shared.

Nora and other participants used a variety of writing-centered digital tools like Grammarly, an online editing application. LRRH particularly enjoyed Grammarly as the program offered edits and a bit of writing instruction. MyBib.com proved to be especially efficient for Jessica Watkins and Bernadette Volkov's research. Participants primarily used programs like Microsoft Word to write their documents; the STEM students often used Excel spreadsheets to sort and chart qualitative data sets. Maria Joseph was the only student who spoke of using an analog tool; she hangs a high-visual paper calendar above her home workspace to track deadlines. Nora used other digital platforms like diaries for setting goals and keeping notes and tracking ideas she would have and want to run by me and questions that came up that she wanted to try out on me before addressing them with her advisor.

Coaching Nora DeJohn

"I finally know what I am doing." - Nora DeJohn

Several writing affordances emerged from my one-on-work with Nora. While these are explored in-depth through another participant case in Chapter 5, below I provide an overview of some of the micro-elements of our work together, or details of the interaction between tools, rules, and community, that made a difference for Nora. We discovered that having a consistent person to address concerns, to be an audience, to hold the writer accountable to goals, to help design tools, and to be there emotionally helped participants overcome writing activity system contradictions.

Social and Emotional Connection to Campus Community

Emotional support is very important to Nora, and she values having someone she trusts listen to her ideas because talking about them helps her sort and organize her thought processes. Graduate isolation can occur when a student feels their advisor is too busy with other priorities or not open to direct instruction. Nora is physically removed from the UTEP campus, so she does not interact socially with her peers. Sometimes she feels "that no one else is going through this – the same thing I am – which is really scary" and she finds herself more productive and positive after someone listens to her academic ideas, as well as talking about the doctoral process and the common distress most graduate students encounter. Working with her one-on-one through Zoom and occasionally facetime when the storms hit her community have assisted her in moving forward but have also created an academic partnership based on friendship and trust.

Being There for Her

A vital element of working with Nora was my availability. Nora lives in a different time zone and her time for writing is limited to when her children are otherwise occupied, and

between driving them to their various activities. Meeting through Zoom made it easier to find times to work around our schedules as we could Zoom from phones or between activities. To work around her high school and younger age children and husband's rotating shifts and track team practice, we had breakfast, lunch, and just-before-bed fifteen-minute Zoom meetings to talk about her ideas or address her questions. When I asked her to reflect on what worked over the past two semesters, my accessibility emerged as key.

> I think probably the most important – number one in prioritizing is your accessibility to me to be able to talk to you about what I was thinking – and even the way that we – putting my document on Google docs- even that - the actual workflow – the working of it.

Nora especially liked having a consistent person constantly available even during non-academic hours. While she had positive experiences with the University Writing Center graduate student tutor, Nora preferred having one person who already knew her research and was available even after hours for a quick chat or check-in or cheerleading session. We met officially 65 times via Zoom over the course of two semesters; however, that number does not count the quick texts with a request for clarification, a synonym for a term that was becoming redundant, or just for reassurance. While they did not contact me as often as Nora did, Jessica, Bernadette, and UV Violet also expressed delight with our consistent meetings. Jessica and UV Violet in particular were grateful to have someone who understood their STEM project and thus could ask coherent questions about their research, who learned their writing style, and who did not have to have everything re-explained each time we met.

Nora and I talked often about her concerns regarding not finishing and her fears that she did not know what she was doing or that she was not a real scholar. Bernadette Volkov was grateful to have someone to share her worries about missing due dates for milestones in her writing and her concerns about the final formatting of her dissertation. Jessica Watkins also appreciated having a consistent person who she can rely on to be available when she needs support as STEM writing needs fluctuate during their programs. In our initial interview she expressed a concern:

> I don't have anyone on campus who I can say that has been back and forth with me in terms of a writing resource. I don't have someone who will go back and forth with me. I'll write something and they'll come back and give me feedback and I'll re-edit it and I don't have that resource that I can rely on for back-and-forth input.

Having one person that follows her project became especially helpful to my project participants because I could be part of the progress of their work and be that voice that went "back and forth" with them in a cycle of suggestions and (re)writing. When a writing tool, like a peer coach, creates a safe and consistent space, writers can talk about their ideas without fear of reprisal, they can seek feedback that can inform instead of stall their process. Nora and I's relationship centered trust and respect, but it was not until after a semester and a half of consistent cycles of goal setting and tool creating that Nora felt she could trust me with even more delicate work: her conference talk.

Audience Participation

Nora and I worked on a conference talk wherein she presented her research for an international community via Zoom. She was incredibly nervous and imposter syndrome had a firm grip on her mind, throat, and heart. In order to ease her into her presentation, we brainstormed what in her research would best represent her project and had long conversations about the nature of a conference presentation. She was worried about needing to be an absolute expert, so we talked about an approach wherein she presented herself as an emerging expert. I helped edit her conference proposal then I helped her write a script for her presentation, listened to her talk about ideas, was her practice audience, and supported her emotionally before and after her conference.

My STEM participants had to present their research on a regular basis and enjoyed having an audience who could ask logical questions. Jessica performed her proposal defense and practiced several project updates with me; UV Violet also utilized me as an audience for her updates. Bernadette and I went over her proposal defense six times before she presented. During our practices, I would listen deeply and take notes then give them feedback on their presentation style, ask questions about the research they presented, and even help them with the design of their PowerPoints.

Holding her Accountable

Nora was not entirely prepared for the transition from guided student to independent researcher and has wondered at the lack of specific instruction and lack of writing support from her department. As we have worked together, we have both come to understand that the nature of the dissertation is self-paced, and advisors can and should allow the emerging expert independence. Writing therefore becomes easily de-prioritized in favor of more urgent activity

systems like family situations, weather emergencies, grading, volleyball games, track meets, and other more insistent deadlines. As I worked with Nora, we realized that tools that assist graduate writers at this stage of their program must include accountability to assist students in making and setting independent goals beyond that which they set with their advisors.

Each week Nora and I set writing goals. She liked having specific goals like the number of pages she should have written by the next week and how that number broke down into how many pages or words she needed to write per day. We built on successes every week and set goals designed to motivate her to write even a paragraph before our next meeting. Part of our goal setting entailed planning her next dissertation steps which allowed her to feel like finishing was possible. Knowing she had to report to me motivated her to have something written before our meeting. We frequently fell short, but she was making incremental progress. Jessica Watkins, UV Violet, and Bernadette Volkov expressed the same appreciation; they made time to write because they knew we were meeting, and they knew I would ask about their progress!

A variation of an accountability tool is a person who can identify when a writer is using research as a way of avoiding writing and bringing her back to the desk. As many of the doctoral students I worked with did, Nora will find reasons to research instead of writing, and those reasons are legitimate concerns about the depth and breadth and scope, and validity of her own claims. When Nora found herself questioning her own hypothesis, she felt she could not move on until she had researched every possible objection her ideas would warrant. Sometimes a new topic would emerge in her research, and she felt it was vital to learn all she could about that topic before she could return to writing. She also enjoyed the research process more than the writing because there was much less risk of making mistakes. Nearly every meeting found me redirecting Nora's goals

from reading another book or looking for primary sources to writing down what she had already researched.

Some STEM participants, UV Violet, Maria Menez, and Jessica found that like Nora, they enjoy the research aspects far more than the writing aspects, and they have valid concerns about experiments, gathering data to understand concepts, and understanding what others have said about their topic. In addition to their advisers, a tool that encourages students like these to set limits by focusing on research questions or setting specific pose-research writing goals helped these scholars return to their writing.

Peer Writing Expert

Nora recognizes that previous criticism her style of writing has garnered does not equate to criticism of her intellect. She has "done the intellectual work" and has been and is a high-achieving academic. As a person who values learning, she wants supports that do not just edit or correct her grammar but teach her the expectations of the academic genres and language her project requires. When Nora and I met for our first session, she made clear that she did not want an editor, she wanted a learning experience.

> But in terms of support, as much as I want this – I want to learn from this. I want to learn how to write. So going forward, when I tackle another project, whether I tackle another project, whether I publish my dissertation, whether I do nothing, and I'm offering assistant to someone, whether it's my student or whatever, I want to be able to teach them. So as much as I want the idea support and any type of idea flow, I want – that I defiantly need too- um, but I do want to learn from it so I will ask a lot of questions.

As we worked together, whenever I corrected a grammar or organization error in her work, she wanted to know specifically why the error was an error. As we worked through mechanics and the organization of her paper, she felt more confident in her writing because she understood how academic writing works. An effective writing tool, for Nora, is one that empowers her with skills that she can use in her future endeavors. She wants to know where her writing is falling short, but also how to identify problems in writing and how to explain to others (and remind herself) why the problem manifests as a problem, how to correct the error and what thought process goes into deciding error-correction strategy. In-depth instruction requires time and trust.

Nora's and my regular Tuesday 4:30 PM meetings centered on reviewing her goals from the previous week and ascertaining if progress had been made. If progress had been made, we examined the tools that helped her move forward. If progress had not been made, we examined the activity systems or other blockages that impeded her progress. The tools that helped Nora make significant progress in writing were charts that helped her focus her research gathering and prepare her for the analysis phase.

I created one chart for her that prepared her for the rhetorical structure of her arguments. In order to create this chart, we reverse-engineered a few mentor texts in the form of dissertations from her discipline which the librarians at the UTEP Library were more than happy to help us locate on ProQuest. To help her focus on what evidence she chose, keep track of citations/sources, and prepare to analyze the evidence in context, I created a chart with the headings in Figure 4. Nora utilized the chart to organize her piles of research notes and evidence. She added the colors because, as she is a visual learner, the color-coding helped Nora make associations and remember where which items went. I added the numbers to help her remember which order the information will probably go when she converts her data into paragraphs.

We built the chart based on a reverse engineering of one of the mentor texts, a successful dissertation her advisor directed two years previous to Nora and I's collaboration. As we analyzed the chapters, I showed Nora where the writer had organized their research by (1) summarizing the source she used (2) introduced evidence that proved her summary was a correct reading (3) analyzed the source's implications based on Nora's interpretations and connections. The other sections helped Nora organize her research chronologically (Actual Event Date), keep track of source citations for future use (Publication Date/Citation), and track themes that emerged from her research. Analyzing the mentor text's rhetorical moves helped us construct a tool that allowed Nora to differentiate relevant research from superfluous and plan for future writing. Her challenges with research helped us develop the parts of the tool that address her specific needs for organization and visual learning.

Actual Event Date	2. Event Narrative: person, place, or event Evidence (quote)	Publication Date/Citation	Researcher's interpretation of events and the characteristics that shape the interpretation	1. Meaning behind and summary of what researcher is saying about the _____	3. Analysis What does ____ mean and who has created that meaning. Why are they creating THAT meaning [power]?

Figure 4: Research Guiding Chart for Nora DeJohn.

After she gathered, sorted, and pre-analyzed information and we eased her into the writing phase, I created a loose outline that guides her in taking her evidence and the analysis preparation and

organizing those chunks into chapters that followed a logical and chronological pattern. We based the chapter outlines on the chart in Figure 4, but also looked at the overall layout of the chapters of our mentor texts to understand the genre's structure and how the analysis paragraphs and chunks of paragraphs should be ordered, titled/subtitled, and figured out how traditionally broad or specific the different chapters are in dissertations in her field.

In numerous sessions, we worked through one paragraph sentence by sentence. In addition to close reading, editing, and analyzing her logic, one of the supports that helped Nora address her logic gaps was giving her space to talk about and question her ideas. After she explained her thoughts about her research and asked for specific feedback, I answered her questions and summarize her ideas so that she can hear how another person understands her articulation. This activity refined and clarified her process and has led to productive writing sessions. When we started meeting, she had two paragraphs started. When this research phase ended, she had written four chapters.

Nora appreciated having a peer writing expert that could take a quick look at a sentence between our sessions or answer a quick question that prevented her from moving forward until answered. She found having a person who listened to her talk about her research and her plans out loud useful. We found she processed information better by talking and was able to move forward once she had articulated what she thought would be the next steps. We also found that because of negative interactions in the past, Nora responded well to positive affirmations about her writing progress, ideas, and trajectories.

Deep Listening, Deep Caring

One of the most important aspects of writing supports must be a safe place for the graduate student. Writing is deeply personal and the journey through the process can be emotionally

traumatizing. Nora saw an expert in the field mentoring someone who was struggling with their academic progress. She spoke of her mentor's experience with a struggling student and the measures she saw him take for the graduate writer:

> But I think probably what he did to help him was- in a similar way that you did- there is this close relationship- you're looking at, you are talking to this person weekly – if not every day- getting to know how they write- understanding that he understood the discipline already- but you understand.

The first step to creating a space where a writer can flourish is to create a safe space by building a "close relationship" which includes building a two-way trust between both parties. Over the course of an academic year and 65 Zoom sessions, Nora and I were able to build a relationship that centered on trust, appreciation for education, and the determination to facilitate her dissertation completion - also a slightly warped sense of humor, experiences as coaches and trials as mothers. Our relationship helped Nora feel comfortable enough to talk through ideas often, even if she suspected those ideas might not contribute to my opinion of her as an accomplished scholar.

Tools that give writers space to talk about ideas and ask questions about research, planning, writing, and occasionally about life in general, may help writers work through intellectual and emotional blocks. Talking can also help writers organize their thoughts and test theories that sound logical in their minds, but when spoken out loud and are questioned can collapse. Even if the support is not in the writer's field, they can listen and ask clarifying questions. Often after Nora had to explain her ideas to my not-in-her-discipline-ears, she would clarify her own understanding and see ways of moving forward, even when all of it seemed impossible.

Going in for the Win

Nora has made significant progress in the time we have worked together and her confidence in her own writing has risen. A writing tool for graduate students, especially for women returning to school who may have a history of self-doubt or low self-worth, would be especially effective if that tool provided reassurances and celebrated successes because being validated and recognized builds self-efficacy which can motivate a writer to continue, despite challenges. When I asked her to reflect on our work together, Nora reported:

> Ok, so not being hard me on me, I think I've actually made some progress. Compared to- there's pre-Jennifer and post-Jennifer. Pre, I was going very slow, running around with – like a chicken with its head cut off- unsure of myself, afraid of my shadow, but I do feel like since I've worked with you or started- I clearly have made some headway. My dissertation chair had mentioned to me – when I spoke to him on Tuesday- that I've made progress, so I do feel like- of course, want to go faster – but every grad student says that, right?

A consistent person, specific writing feedback, setting goals with an accountability tool, hand-crafted writing tools, giving Nora space to talk, plan, question, and listen in the safety of an academic friendship has helped her move her activity writing system closer to achieving its object.

Summary

Chapter 4 has answered Research Questions 1 and 2 through a close examination of Nora DeJohn's writing experiences and the experiences of the other participants of this study. The findings indicate that participants' CHAT maps indicate contradictions in activity systems that do

pull resources away from writing activity systems and thus writing can become a barrier that may look insurmountable; however, although issues like health and pets and employment and conflicting academic priorities challenged participants, they found ways to answer those challenges with their affordances of motivation, creativity, courage, and perseverance to find people, software, and support groups, or, in CHAT terms, tools. This study found that the tools, or supports they assembled facilitated their writing activity systems as they face "challenges and accommodation to these challenges" in order to successfully finish their writing projects and their degrees (Lundell & Beach, 2003). The coaching model that emerged from my CHAT/FST and action research proved an especially effective tool as the coaching model can address individuals' concerns about writing and keep pace with the participant's changing needs as they progress through their writing activity system.

Chapter 5 describes the five affordances that emerged from the peer coaching model developed over the course of this study. The affordances of the peer coach model answer Research Question Three's request for tools designed to address the contradictions found in participants' writing activity systems and model include a consistent and knowledgeable peer who can, because of their similar situations as a peer, understand the complex nature of the writers' activity systems, but who is also a peer who is a writing expert who can guide writers through redirection and accountability tools as well as provide a safe space for performances, socialization, and emotional support.

Chapter 5

The Peer Writing Coach Model: On the Sidelines, but in the Game

As I noted in Chapter 4, over the course of one or two semesters, I met with four participants in one-on-one sessions which included specific feedback about their writing, performing and then reflecting on presentations, setting accountability goals, answering technical questions about academic English and academic genres, talking through their ideas, and sometimes designing writing templates to organize and move their projects forward. The peer writing coach model allowed me to become a partner in the development of my participants' writing tools, and often, a tool in their writing activity system. The vantage point of a peer writing mentor gave me insights into the writing experiences of mature women graduate students and the affordances that having a peer writing coach brings.

As I worked with my participants as a peer writing coach, I discovered that the peer coaching model has great potential for understanding and articulating the challenges and triumphs of returning graduate women. As their peer writing coach, I was able to immediately address participants' writing questions with directed instruction in addition to identifying and helping them through their writing stumbling blocks. The peer coaching model we co-developed based on my expertise but also on participants' needs and suggestions, also offered space for encouragement, celebration, and motivation to persist. By building productive academic friendships, we were also able to provide the emotional support of personal connections to mitigate feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome. We built places of safety so the women could bring their true selves and experiences to our sessions; thus, the writing tools we designed and implemented were based on their authentic lived lives and addressed the core of their writing struggles because we got to know each other on deeply personal levels and were able to share

our fears, express our anxieties and admit to being fallible humans. Even after the research phase of this project ended, each of my project participants and four of my interview participants still work with me because they find having a writing coach an invaluable tool to facilitating progress in their writing activity system.

This chapter answers Research Question Three which addresses the tools that best facilitate writing progress and the steps UTEP (and other institutions) can take to support graduate women writers returning to academia. This chapter focuses on the peer writing coach model because it directly addresses the tools the participants in this study found most useful. To illustrate the five major affordances of this model, I offer an in-depth description of Jessica Watkins' experiences as a grandmother, a woman in STEM, and an L2+ writer with many competing activity systems. Her marginalized position puts her at statistical risk of dropping out before completing her program and studying her experiences can inform writing tools that can benefit all of UTEP's graduate writers Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Wollast et al., 2018; Walkington, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Li, 2014; Ali & Coate, 2012; Russell, 2013; Woldfsberger, 2014; Casanave, 2002; Baker, 1998; Aronson & Swanson, 1991. As I did with Nora in Chapter 4, in this chapter, other writers' experiences are juxtaposed with Jessica's to provide greater detail and nuance.

Coaching Jessica Watkins

Jessica Watkins, whom I will refer to as Jessica in this chapter, is a wife, mother, L2+ writer, and grandmother who is seeking a PhD in STEM. As a STEM doctoral student, her academic activity systems nudge her to prioritize experiments, work for her department, and prepare for and deliver presentations before she can focus on her writing. Her family takes priority over her studies; however, Jessica has been able to carefully balance her personal life and

education. We worked together on her proposal during the Fall of 2020 as part of a Graduate School Writing Group program called Mama Bear PhDs; we were the only active members, so we used our 14 sessions to meet one-on-one for a total of 160 hours. Originally, in the fall semester, we were set to be a group of three; there was another participant who had enrolled in the Mama Bear PhDs group, but she did not respond to our emails and did not join our meetings. Her non-response was one of my first clues that even people who want writing tools may not always have the time or energy to invest in obtaining those tools. During the Spring semester the group picked up two more members, so we met as a group of four 11 times; not every woman attended every meeting. Jessica was only able to make five of those sessions, and we had three one-on-one sessions for a total of 10 hours for a total of 17 one-on-one sessions for a total of 170 one-on-one hours. Before our work together began in the Fall of 2020, Jessica attended a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) writing camp for underrepresented people in STEM. She is still in contact with her mentor (who is located several states away) from the camp but only contacts that mentor when she cannot find closer resources. Figure 5 is Jessica's CHAT activity system map.

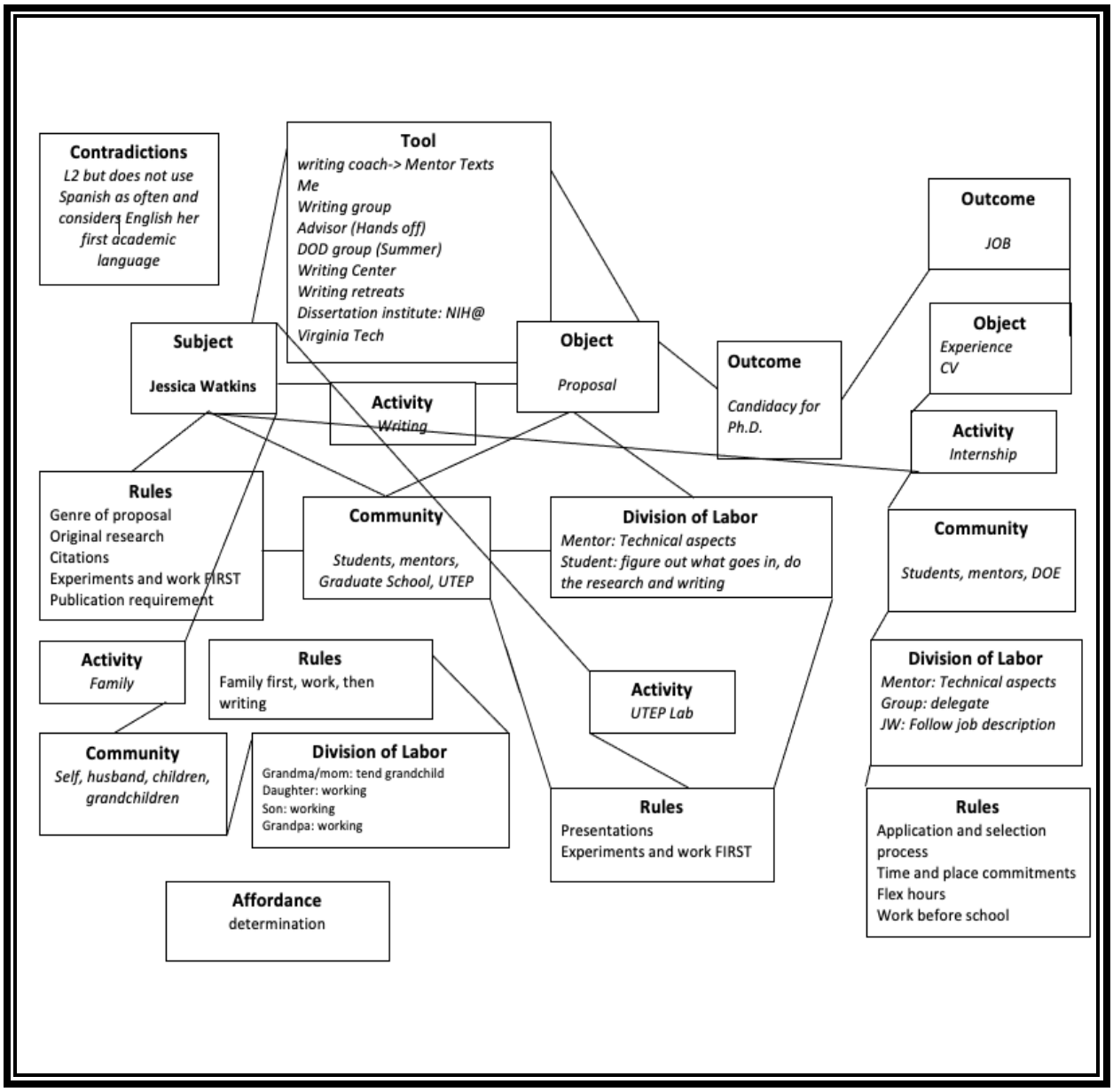

Figure 5: Jessica Watkin's Activity Systems CHAT.

As I worked with Jessica, I noticed that her research priorities, like many other STEM graduate students I worked with, relegated writing to the end of the process. Lab experiments are often subject to lab availability or other time-sensitive situations, so when the opportunity to conduct an experiment arises, all other activities become lower priorities. UV Violet especially struggled with fitting in writing because her experiments were weather-dependent, and she had to drop every priority when circumstances were ideal for her experiments. She had to reschedule

our meetings eight times; Maria Martinez faced similar problems. In our interview, she spoke of how her access to experiments to generate data determined if she had anything about which to write, so her experiments always had to come first. COVID-19 lockdowns stalled her progress because she had very limited access to the labs in which she needed to conduct her research which meant she could not progress in writing her dissertation. Their rescheduling and difficulty in moving forward on projects showed me that their writing, as a lower but mandatory priority, can then manifest as a cognitive struggle. While Jessica enjoys conducting experiments, writing about her research can be much less rewarding.

> I feel like I'm constantly fighting; I think that my major struggle with this is that I sometimes feel lost and whenever I don't feel like what I am doing is worthwhile or I'm not getting anywhere then I'll go to something else that I can accomplish rather it's like cleaning a toilet so that I feel like I've completed something. Or whatever, you know. So, I think that that's what is really hurting me is that I can't focus or stay on target. I've having a lot of issues staying – staying at it and just completing it. I feel like I've been working on it for what I feel is just too long. It seems like the fact that the PhD just kind of gives you the luxury of just doing it on your own time doesn't really help at all. I remember being an undergrad and really excelling because it was very clearly outlined as to when you had to have something done and you just work at it at the task and be done with it whereas this is on my own time and any time I struggle, I have a hard time staying on task.

When that self-paced part manifests in loose deadlines, the writing process can drag out for years. However, I started to see that one of the STEM barriers to degree completion is not just a looming writing project, but the order/priority in which experiments are conducted and data analyzed and then writing performed. I learned from my STEM students' experiences that writing in graduate programs varies in pace and sometimes STEM students do not need the coaching aspect every week, but they often want a peer to talk to about their experiments and research. Their advisor is probably the person who would be the most invested audience, but Jessica, Nora, and UV Violet worried about not sounding like experts when they talked to their advisors, and advisors are very busy with their own competing activity systems. I found that my STEM participants enjoyed explaining their research to someone who was not in their field but understood their research because (1) they had space to make mistakes while practicing being the experts and (2) I have been with them for much of their progress, so I understand their research and them.

Part of Jessica's struggle is that her advisor "is very hands-off," especially during the writing aspect of a PhD student's research and she was not entirely sure how to approach the genre of the proposal. Her uncertainty caused her to worry about failing this important milestone. When Jessica struggles with fears of failure in her academic activity system, sometimes a success elsewhere can alleviate some of the frustrations, so she will clean a bathroom or over-research an aspect of her project. As noted in earlier chapters, the PhD research process asks students to become experts by planning, designing, executing, and writing about their projects without an advisor dictating parameters. The transition from student to expert can be disorienting as the transition requires risk-taking which means failure is a possibility. I have found that even

in my most accomplished and competent participants, the fear of failure can impede progress by making it difficult for the writer to start and/or stay "on task."

Identified Writing Objects

The first semester we worked together, Jessica was assembling her proposal for candidacy and utilizing a mentor text from a student who had graduated and to whose work she had contributed and upon which she is building her project. By the ending phase of the research for this project, Jessica and I had successfully moved her through the proposal into the all-but-the-dissertation phase, which for her, meant fewer writing projects and more experiments with progress presentations before gathering enough data to assemble a dissertation. To my initial distress, after her successful defense, we worked less consistently. When I asked her why she did not want to meet as often, she told me she had very few subsequent writing projects, but many experiments and research projects; in addition, she became the primary caretaker for her grandchild during COVID lockdowns. During the Spring 2021 semester, we met and talked in our writing group (Mama PhDs) five times, and I worked with Jessica three times on her proposals for internships and a research project. When Jessica graduates, she hopes to work for the Department of Energy and possibly NASA. Although Jessica's doctoral writing activity system has many of the same steps and mandates as other STEM participants, Jessica joined the PhD program many years after her undergraduate studies and skipped a masters degree program; thus, she often feels like she might be "missing something" as she writes because she does not have the experiences, and certainly not recent experiences, of her peers who have recently completed masters coursework, readings, and writings. She found that the peer coaching model effectively addressed her gaps, and I learned a great deal about crafting STEM writing tools from our work together.

No Substitutions: My Role as a Peer Coach

Jessica's advisor, as most doctoral advisors, is both her guide and gatekeeper. My goals in this research were not to replace or challenge the authority of participants' advisors, much less substitute them. A peer writing coach is a peer, not someone with more authority, but experience as a writer, who works with a graduate writer as a writing expert who also knows how to find and use tools that may facilitate writing projects (software, campus resources). As I worked with my participants, I envisioned our peer writing coach model as a tool that provided affordances for writers, but as I researched, I found that the model has the potential to support graduate advisors as well. Advisors have a substantial impact on the success of the student's academic career and a great influence on their post-educational employment (Livinţi et al., 2021; Aitchison, 2014; Guerin, 2014; Thesen, 2014; Maher, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Casanave, 2002). Advisors' responsibilities are many (Chapter 2) and graduate students are in a position where they are supposed to be moving towards independence; however, the relationship with their advisors is the most crucial academic relationship of graduate students.

Each advisor invests a different level of supervision, and the division of labor varies from professor to professor. Jessica's advisor is "hands-off", and expects Jessica to independently design her research, conduct experiments, and pace her writing. Mena finds turning to her advisor "even more stressful because then it is more feedback and more revision. So, it's kind of like- you don't want to go that route because it is going to come back in a kind of backlash" thus, she only asks for her advisor's support "when it is absolutely mandatory." Maria Martinez's frustration arises in advisor feedback that does not address corrections and guidance that could facilitate successful future writing. While under-advised, writing had become unpleasant for LRRH, but after her well-received request that her advisor increase their involvement, LRRH

was able to successfully submit her portfolio and qualifying exam. Violet UV's advisor is instrumental in advocating for resources for her project and plays a significant part in shaping her articles by providing feedback on texts that will become chapters; however, the advisor leaves the preponderance of the planning and execution and writing to Violet UV.

Often, women who are returning to the academy's competing activity systems do not allow them productive access to professors, projects, or socialization that traditional full-time students may have. Many of them feel they should not ask their advisors for writing assistance but would like access to resources that fill in any gaps in their writing skills or can help them move a project towards completion. The peer writing coach model can help address the gaps of writers with less access to their advisors for whatever reason.

Well before I started my dissertation research, I started volunteering to help graduate students with writing projects and I quickly became a fixture at the Graduate School Writing Retreats where I found that graduate writing seems, to my neophyte eyes, to be the greatest barrier to graduation. As I worked with a variety of graduate students on a wide variety of projects, many writers expressed gratitude for having a peer, and not someone whose opinion could be detrimental to their careers, helpful in that I gave them motivation, but not scary deadlines. I also found that in addition to my writing expertise, they enjoyed just having a peer who knew the despairs and triumphs of graduate life to talk to, to toss ideas around, and occasionally to wipe their tears.

What do Graduate Women Writers Want?

Five Key Affordances of Working with a Pear Writing Coach

Research Question Two addressed the tools that graduate women writers find most and least helpful. As I interviewed participants and worked with participants on projects, I kept notes

regarding the comments, narratives, and challenges of the participants. To answer Research Question Two, I made special note of tools they said were helpful, tools they did not find helpful, and tools they thought might be helpful in addressing their concerns, worries, and challenges with writing. For example, the participants all expressed desires for direct instruction, like writing classes; however, writing classes emerged as almost non-existent once the student is out of their undergraduate program. As I listened to participants, I realized that each writer needed individualized writing tools which would make designing a graduate writing course that addresses every graduate student's idiosyncratic challenges extremely difficult (and expensive!). However, every participant in this study wanted to learn how to write as an expert in their field; thus, an effective writing tool must not just get a writer through a project, but beyond the degree and into their career, so I looked for other tools that offered the affordances of direct and individualized instruction.

Participants expressed a range of feelings about their relationship with their advisors; most had positive relationships but were not entirely sure how to articulate the kind of feedback they would most appreciate from their very busy advisors. Some writers felt they should not ask their advisors about writing because their advisor's field was technical, and they felt their advisors expected them to already be writing at a professional level. The writers' fears of being rejected by their advisors or disappointing them or falling short of their ideals sometimes threatened to slow, stall, or end students' writing processes.

All of the participants in my study who attended Graduate School Writing Retreats found the time to be productive, enjoyed the accountability and goal setting, and the safe space to be an expert in their field. The writing groups offered some social and emotional support in addition to a ready audience with a variety in feedback but were difficult for busy women to attend and

maintain. UTEP offers a variety of in-person and digital tools through the Library and UWC which can make a graduate writer's project easier to manage, but many of the participants in this study were either unaware of the tools, hesitant to utilize them or did not have the time to learn how to use the tools.

The peer writing coach model can address all of the above concerns without mitigating the advisors' vital role in a writer's progress; in fact, the peer writing coach model can assist the advisor by addressing writing concerns and helping the student move towards timely completion of their project. Table 3 lists the tools that participants found helpful in facilitating their writing progress and describes the affordance of the peer writing coach model that addresses their desired tool.

Table 3: Affordances of Peer Writing Coach

What They Want	Peer Writing Coach (PWC) Affordance
Consistency: the same person following their progress Flexibility: there when needed as needed Someone who understands that they may need to change their writing pacing because of other academic and life priorities.	PWC can have the **flexibility** to work with writers when they need a coach; they can **consistently** follow writers through lengthy projects.
Audience for presentations A safe place for talking through ideas A place to practice being an expert	PWC can provide a **safe space** for writers to experiment with high-stakes ideas and presentations in a low-stakes environment.
Accountability Guidance/pacing in goal setting Redirecting; bring writers back to their object Helping writers stay on track	PWC can learn writer's patterns and identify appropriate pacing, hold writers **accountable,** and **redirect** if necessary.
Direct language assistance Someone who can tell them what tools are available and help them use those tools A writing expert to help with big and little edits L2+ language support Classes on graduate writing	PWC has **knowledge of academic writing** and of university/other tools and can directly address writers' concerns as well as identify and teach the skills they need to progress.

Emotional support Social support Someone who understands that they are busy and other activity systems will get in the way of their writing systems.	PWC can form **academic friendships** of deep understanding and caring and support writers by warding off feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, and hopelessness.

Affordance 1: The Strength and Flexibility Coach

During the semesters of this research, I discovered that one of the affordances of a peer coaching model is that inconsistent writers have a flexible and consistent writing tool. STEM writers' writing progress, as described above, depends on their research progress and in UV Violet's case, locating a statistician then explaining her project to the statistician and data then understanding the statistician's complex results. My humanities writers had more steady pacing than the STEM writers; however, they also had children, elderly parents, jobs, in one case a car wreck, and other priorities and situations that slow down, if not halt their progress. The participant in the car wreck suffered for weeks from headaches that stopped her writing cold. Jessica had to worry about her health as well as her family and especially the young grandchild for whom she became the primary caretaker.

The women in this study had to worry about their own health, but also the health of their partners, children, and parents. While Nora was relatively healthy, her children became ill a few times during our work, and she had to stop her writing progress to attend to their care. Brisa Solaris found that the stresses of her competing activity systems and being an older student resulted in health complications that took time and attention away from her writing activity system; she also had to attend to her disabled child and an elderly father who was in and out of the hospital constantly. Especially salient during this research was the fear of COVID-19 infecting their families, especially their younger children and their older parents. Because I was a

researcher who was interested in studying their situations in order to deeply understand and then articulate their experiences, and because I am a peer who understood their situations, admired their work, and cared about them as writers and people, I was able to be flexible and reschedule or refocus our meetings, provide emotional supports, and be ready for when they were ready to pick up the pace. As a peer writing coach and not a super-busy advisor or writing tutor they only meet with sporadically, I could be their consistent, yet flexible writing tool.

One of the reasons Jessica wanted a consistent writing coach was an experience she had at the University Writing Center. Her expectation was that when she went to the University Writing Center, she would be presenting her work to a writing expert who understood the proposal genre in her field and would be able to give her guidelines for revision:

> When I went to the Writing Center and I wasn't sure how I was doing, I don't think that I understood what the Writing Center was there to offer me because I thought they were to going to do that: read it then give me feedback then rewrite it then- because I feel like that was what I really need in order to continue. It seems like what they were there for was so that they can just look up a writing style and share with me a resource, just give me the link for like APA style.

The University Writing Center tutor did not offer the writing tool she wanted, but they did offer research information that would have been valuable to a student who was trying to understand APA citation requirements. Unfortunately, Jessica wanted more detailed feedback, and her project requires a different citation style. Her experiences with her NEH writing coach informed

some of her high expectations of the University Writing Center tutor and she did have more success in meeting her expectations with our coaching model.

> I think that [having a writing coach] is extremely valuable because even the Writing Center- I've been there before, and they put you on this list and look at your paper, and every time you go you get somebody different and although that could be a good model for what does a general audience think of your work – it might not necessarily be what you need in terms of guiding you to the next step like how a coach would.

The University Writing Center is not without merit and does provide valuable services for undergraduate and graduate students. Jessica did not know about the graduate writing tutor option and therefore did not utilize the tool available for her. As a peer writing coach, I was able to find and explain tools that helped her with citations and ask her to delineate her expectations so I could adjust my approach in meeting her needs. The UWC tutors, who are available for all of the thousands of UTEP students, may not have the luxury of taking the time to get to know a single writer over multiple sessions which can stretch over several semesters.

At the beginning of Fall 2020, Jessica and I met ostensibly as a Graduate School Writing Group called Mama Bear PhDs, but after she found out the crux of my research and invited me to participate in her project, we turned our writing group sessions into one-on-one meetings wherein we worked on overcoming writing blocks and addressing her questions about format, genre, citations, and any other research/writing concern she wanted to address. We met nearly every Wednesday at 4:00 PM and talked about her writing goals, progress, what tools helped her, what tools she needed, and reviewed the writing her week's work had produced. She enjoyed

having a consistent person and always came prepared with specific questions and texts she wanted me to review. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, her precise preparation arose out of working with a "hands-off" professor who had little time to address writing concerns. She often felt alone and isolated because

> I don't have anyone on campus who I can say that has been back and forth with me in terms of a writing resource. I don't have someone who will go back and forth with me. I'll write something and they'll come back and give me feedback and I'll re-edit it and I don't have that resource that I can rely on for back-and-forth input.

The uncertainty while navigating unknowns can be emotionally taxing. Jessica appreciated a writing tool that was consistent and that she could rely on to be available when she needed it. After two semesters of working together, during our exit interview, I asked Jessica to reflect on our work together and to describe what other writing tools were or would be most effective to facilitate her writing process.

> I think what you said hit the nail on the head- that people will just want to springboard ideas off of and just talk to. I think that helps a lot because when I'm stuck in my mind, I can convince myself, either way, is it like should I do this, or should I do this or no, but this sounds good, but no? So, I'll sit there, and I'll sit in that place for way too long. When I have you, I can move forward and I saw that in my very first semester, so I know it works. I know the value of having you there as a coach, mentor, whatever you want to

call it, I know that you are what is moving me forward- or I need you to move me forward.

For Jessica, having a consistent person, like her NEH writing coach and me, gave her someone she could trust to talk about ideas, especially when she found herself stuck and unable to confidently decide how to proceed in her research. The ponderance of our meetings included me listening carefully while Jessica explained her project, what progress she had made, and her thought process. She found the time productive because verbally working through her "analysis paralysis," or overthinking, gave her a chance to get out of her own head and start committing to choices that moved her project forward. I found that a peer writing coach model allows the coach and writer, through consistent and flexible availability, to create spaces of trust. As with Nora, I noticed with Jessica that establishing trust between a writing tool and a writer is vital to the effectiveness of the relationship. One of the reasons the participants trusted me is that I had similar same activity systems; I am a teacher, a graduate student, a mother, a woman returning to graduate school after a decade away, and I, too, was working through high-stakes graduate writing projects. My other project participants agreed also that one of the most important tools for graduate writers is having a consistent peer who understands their complicated lives and their research to listen and question them so they can arrive at clarification and move on to the writing.

Team Effort?

Consistency emerged as one of the most important aspects of a writing tool. While almost all of my participants spoke highly of writing groups, very few (Brisa and Yun Lin) belonged to groups that persisted for more than a semester. The Mama Bear PhD group faded entirely after one semester of fairly consistent meetings. During the Spring semester of 2021, I took it upon

myself to email the three other members every week with a Zoom link (I hosted the meetings as well) and a suggested agenda for the meeting. Members were inconsistent in attendance, but I had at least one other member every week until the end of May when everyone needed to attend to their semester-end projects. My participants found that groups that formed out of courses and evolve to meet their members' changing needs can provide social aspects to writing like peer feedback and mentoring, accountability, and emotional supports, but are very hard to sustain. Many of my participants utilized writing groups as a venue to practice presentations. The contradictions that can arise in writing groups are time constraints, especially for women with competing activity systems that include families whose needs must be prioritized. Catherine had an especially difficult time finding groups that met when she could; Muktaa pointed out that sometimes personalities clash and those conflicts can rupture the group and render them unproductive and potentially emotionally harmful. I found that trying to make the writing group viable required a great deal of energy and resilience. The peer coach model was easier for me, as the coach, because I only had to persuade one person to meet me per session and as the session revolved around their work, the participants were more eager to meet one-on-one.

Nora enjoyed the Graduate School's Online Writing Retreats but was unable to join the Graduate School Writing Groups because of her time difference and time-taking priorities. Some reasons graduate students might not utilize Graduate School writing supports could be time constraints or like in LRRH's situation, not knowing how to access the supports and being reluctant to ask for assistance. Maria Joseph attended a few of the Graduate School Writing Retreats, but reported that while she liked the accountability measure, she preferred working with one specific peer, A peer writing coach can address individual needs by flexible with scheduling and addressing

specific writing concerns in a safe space. Thus, the advantages of peer writing coach over writing groups include flexibility and consistency, a little bit of gentle nudging, and a lot of cheering.

Affordance 2: Coaching as a Spectator Sport

A surprising affordance I stumbled on during the Spring of 2020 was that participants enjoyed having an audience, not just to voice ideas, but to perform their many presentations. As a peer, I could offer a non-threatening space for the participant to practice high and low-stakes presentations. Some STEM fields require almost weekly updates in addition to presentations that determine whether they remain in their program or are phased back for remediation -or phased out entirely.

After the Fall of 2020 and after her successful defense, Jessica's mandatory writing lessened considerably. She performed several presentations for me and did perform once for the Mama Bears PhD group to receive feedback from a member in a discipline closely related to hers in addition to people outside of her field who could give aesthetic and performance advice and a lot of moral support. Other than when she needed to practice performances, Jessica faded; mostly because she had other priorities to attend to.

> I feel like what happened was the first semester that we were working together, you know you really got me through that hurdle. You really – I was stuck in analysis paralysis for a long time, and you really just got me to do it and got it done and I got that proposal out of the way, and I got it done and I attribute that to you. And then the semester after, I kind of hit a slow point because they closed the lab so I just started applying for everything and then I ended up having to do extra stuff for that so that is why this semester has been so crazy!

When I worked alone with Jessica on presentations, she would perform her presentation as-is and I would take notes on gaps in my understanding, on her performance, and the design of her presentation; I would also time her presentation to ensure she was within her upcoming meeting's parameters. After her performance, we would look over my notes and address the design of her presentation which was helpful because sometimes her photos or diagrams were difficult to see, and I was able to help her organize her slides, so the important visual aspects were arranged so that her slides were not overwhelming and supported her assertions. We discussed the parts of her information I did not understand and, like UV Violet and Nora found, explaining her research helped her clarify her ideas and more than once helped her find places where she needed to fill in informational gaps to create a logical flow of cause and effect. It helped for her to have the same audience from one presentation to the next as I could watch the evolution of her work and not only support her with notes and questions, but cheer on her successes.

Bernadette also found the audience aspect of the peer coaching model essential. During our fifteen sessions which culminated in just over forty-two hours, Bernadette completed and defended her proposal and started her data analysis. Six of our fifteen sessions were Bernadette presenting her proposal defense; I timed her and gave her feedback on everything from PowerPoint design and composition to the structure and flow of her presentation. She did not shy away from "brutal feedback" from someone she esteems as a peer writing expert and appreciated having a trusted coach who cheered her and her ideas on. As I did not realize how many high-stakes presentations graduate students perform or how much graduate students appreciate being cheered on, the audience affordance of the peer coaching model was unexpected, and it is an affordance every

participant valued. I have even been the audience for many of my interview-only participants who, although they did not have time to work with me on a weekly basis, took advantage of my offer to be their practice audience.

Affordance 3: The Coach Who Keeps the Writer Accountable and on Course

Over the course of many coaching sessions, I was able to pick up on behavioral patterns in participants. When they made concrete goals with me, they were more likely to write during the week, or prepare their presentation, or utilize the writing tool we created. I was also able to identify when they were employing writing-avoidance tactics and gently talk them through the issues that turned them away from writing to unnecessary research or to prioritizing anything else over their writing tasks. Thus, I learned that a peer writing coach model offers affordances of accountability tools and gentle redirection. Because of the self-paced nature of the post-coursework writing projects, Jessica found herself leaving writing until after family concerns, lab work, research, and, as she described, cleaning toilets. Thus, Jessica shares, "It seems like the fact that the PhD just kind of gives you the luxury of just doing it on your own time doesn't really help at all." She had enjoyed her undergraduate work "because it was very clearly outlined as to when you had to have something done and you just work at it at the task and be done with it whereas this is on my own time and any time I struggle, I have a hard time staying on task." Thus, some of the most important aspects of the peer coaching model is providing accountability tools that help students envision progress then make progress and tools that help them recognize when they are avoiding writing and then tools that help them overcome their writing barriers.

As part of our accountability, Jessica committed to sharing a number of pages or a section, depending on her deadlines or what other activity systems needed priority. We used Google Docs to share her work; Jessica would include comments in her writing that pointed to

areas wherein she has specific questions she wanted to address in our next session. I would leave my own feedback about her writing and either answer her questions in comments or write a suggestion that we speak about the question in our next Zoom. This preparation helped both of us prepare for productive meetings wherein we talked about her questions, I gave her the specific and instructional feedback she wanted, and we set goals for the next week based on her progress. Having one consistent person follow her project was especially helpful for Jessica because I was able to show her that she was making progress, help her set reasonable goals, and keep her accountable for accomplishing those goals. Jessica always responded to our goal setting positively and one week as we were setting goals, she said:

> It actually made me feel so good when you told me you wanted me to have your intro in the Google Doc by Sunday because it gave me something to look forward to, to strive for and make sure that I got it as complete as I could because had it not been for that deadline, then I would have still been still diddling around with probably the first paragraph.

Jessica, more than once, said our goal setting often shook her out of her "analysis paralysis" because she wanted to have something ready for our meetings, and often in that forced writing, she figured out what it was she needed or wanted to write. Accountability tools are essential to moving graduate writers forward, especially those whose competing activity systems can, like Casnave (2010) describes, scream louder than a dissertation. My experience with Nora DeJohn, described in Chapter 4, also emphasizes the value of accountability.

As noted also in Chapter 4, participants frequently found ways to avoid writing when they feared the feedback that inevitably follows the submission of a text to an authority. As she moved through her proposal, Jessica's most salient concern remained to address the requirements of the genre correctly and completely because she feared her proposal would be deemed inadequate and fail. In addition to cleaning, sometimes she found herself questioning her methods and prioritizing her research activity systems over her writing activity systems to assure herself that her information was supported by previous research.

> I think what is going to make me struggle the most is that I just keep leaning on my prior knowledge as far as I kind of know what to do, but I feel like I need to spend time also on the why- like why did I choose to do this other than I had it available to me; so I'm going to really have to dig into the literature and say this is an accurate way to go about coding the investigation. Is there something I should have led with or maybe I should do something else or trash those results and do something else? I don't know.

As her peer writing coach, I was able to help Jessica see that her research had been adequate, and that writing is a form of learning. As she wrote, she could identify specific gaps that needed filling instead of over-researching and hoping she covered everything. To avoid writing and thus even constructive criticism, Jessica turned to house cleaning and over-researching, Nora plunged down what she called "rabbit holes" of tangentially related research, UV Violet would re-read and re-write the same text over and over again. Several of my interview participants spoke of procrastinating until outside deadlines demand they produce something quickly. The peer writing coach model allows the coach to get to know their writer on a personal level and meet consistently

enough that the coach can start identifying the avoidance techniques of the writer and re-direct their efforts through self-reflection and then guide them through their stalled process and/or help them build tools that will pull (or drag) them through their reluctance.

Affordance 4: The Coach with the Game Plan

An affordance that emerged from the peer coaching model is that having a trusted writing expert alleviates many of the stressors associated with graduate writing. For all graduate writers, and specially for STEM doctoral students like Jessica and Maria Martinez who skipped a masters degree, the genres and languages of graduate work are complex and daunting if they do not have the background in graduate writing, thus they can have less writing self-efficacy. Even participants who had experience with graduate writing could still find their confidence waning as they approached unfamiliar genres or high stakes writing projects. The participants in this study trusted in my peer writing expert status and allowed me to, as it were, call plays to guide their progress as we tackled their projects together.

Although a peer, I do have writing experience and expertise.Volunteering with graduate students for five years before I began this research, my master's degree in RWS, my RWS doctoral course work, and teaching English classes for over fifteen years in secondary and post-secondary institutions have given me experiences in teaching and in learning about teaching writing from basic mechanics to complex genres that require discipline-specific jargon. My years of teaching and tutoring writing at all levels have been in schools that serve large L2+ populations and I have learned as a student and teacher that language ability is not indicative of intelligence but that access to academic language can determine traditional academic success (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Biswas, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b ; Li, 2014; Casanave, 2002). My RWS studies have taught me that writing is a vital part of learning (Busle et al., 2020; Douglas, 2020; Aitchinson, 2014; Paré,

2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Bazerman, 2004; Casenave, 2002), that there are effective strategies for scaffolding writers of any level to any level (Ritzenberg & Mendelsohn, 2021; Clifton, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017; Lynch et al., 2015; Shipka, 2011; Borrowman et al., 2009; Engeström, 2005: Freire, 1994). Anzaldúa (1987), Jordan (1998), hooks (2014), Inoue (2015) and Baker-Bell (2020), are a just a few of the rhetoricians I met along my graduate journey who taught me that writing is power and that the more people empowered, the more intelligently compassionate our world can become. Inspired by my favorite feminist rhetoricians, this research hopes to increase the access all graduate students have to fulfil their academic dreams, especially those whose brilliant ideas have a hard time getting past the academic language.

Keeping L2+ in the Game

Jessica is technically an L2+ writer. Her first language and the language of her parents is Spanish; however, English is the language of her partner and her children, so she does not speak Spanish often. When she was very young, Jessica learned English in strict schools, which puts her at an advantage over other L2+ learners because she learned English as an academic language, not conversational, so writing academically was not as challenging for her as for some L2+ writers (Li, 2014).

While working with the participants in this study, I felt like I was coaching super athletes and that helping them get out of school and into industry will greatly benefit the world through their incredible post-academic careers. One of the most salient contradictions that emerged in my L2+ writers is the gatekeeping nature of academic English. L2+ frustrations can compound the stresses of graduate writing experiences. Students who are learning complex material and writing complex texts in a language that is not their L1 language may not be as familiar with genre

structures, expected logical patterns, or rhetorical moves in US graduate-level academic genres (Li, 2014; Canagarajah, 2012).

Yun Lin and Brisa Solaris spoke of watching their peers presenting and writing in academic English and feeling frustrated when their peers' performances were judged more by their language than their ideas. Mena is especially adamant about the gatekeeping nature of academic English and the doctoral genres that she feels work against any equity in education. This frustration also manifested in Muktaa's concerns with critics who do not understand her style of writing and criticize her rhetorical moves instead of appreciating her ideas. LRRH's reluctance to seek writing assistance for fear of seeming less capable is a reluctance that can leave L2+ learners disheartened and stall their progress.

There are many scholars in RWS who address language inequity; the voices that most disrupted my pedagogical practices as I read through graduate class curriculums were Anzaldúa (1987), Jordan (1998), hooks (2014), Inoue (2015), Paris and Alim (2017) and Baker-Bell (2020) but it was Canagarajah (2012) in my Introduction to Rhetoric class that obliterated my complacency as a composition teacher. These rhetoricians, and all of my L2+ writers, know that the mastery of academic English is not indicative of intelligence, nor is struggling with the language indicative of a lack of academic ability; however, the contradiction between writer's fluency and language expectations can discourage L2+ writers and leave them feeling less academically capable than their L1 peers (Kim & Wolke, 2020; Biswas, 2017; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b ; Li, 2014; Casanave, 2002). A peer writing coach can provide a very safe space for L2+ and L1 learners to practice and refine their language skills.

The Coach who Calls the Plays

Another affordance of a writing coach who is a writing expert is the opportunity for direct writing instruction that addresses the writer's specific skill or knowledge gap or writer's block. Jessica had not taken a writing class in over ten years and found the NEH program's focus on scientific academic writing particularly important in informing her writing process. Jessica did not need expert mechanical writing advice but had questions about citations and precise phrasing and document structure. As we discussed her proposal and worked on her references, she told me:

> One of the major challenges that I am currently experiencing is not having or knowing in terms of structure how I should tell the story. Because then what I start doing is, I end up, I- opening documents and writing whatever thoughts come to mind or whatever I've read that day and putting it in some kind of format then I don't like it and I start a new thing and I'm kind of – the information is all jumbled up and not in one place so that's why I think the reference manager is really going to help.

With permission, Jessica borrowed a mentor text from a colleague to guide her writing. While the mentor text is a proposal that was successful in her department and contains all the elements Jessica needs for writing her own proposal, she also wanted someone who could validate her understanding of how to write her proposal correctly. She had a few minor mechanical questions, and her writing skills were such that she did not need much grammar-focused editing; her mechanical mastery of academic English meant that we could use our time

focusing on the genre aspects of her document, so our early sessions focused on a genre analysis of her mentor text.

Putting into practice elements of rhetorical genre studies, as Jessica's peer writing coach, we broke down the content, order, and logic of the mentor text and guided her in emulating its structure. Genre analysis utilizes critical theories of rhetoric to analyze the rhetorical situation or the exigency that produces the text, or the purpose of the text, and the audience from whom the writer would like a response and the parameters in which the rhetor must be bound (Bitzer, 1968). The genre analysis I used with my writers when deconstructing mentor texts, like proposals or theses or dissertations, followed Rhetorical Genre Studies understanding that genres occur in replicable social situations (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Graduate writers in a discipline write to address similar situations, like proposals to seek permission to proceed with research and these and dissertations to conclude degrees, so analyzing a successful mentor text is examining, what Miller (1984) describes as a rhetorical reaction to a social situation. Her description builds on Bitzer's ideas but adds that it is social situations that create genres. In the case of a graduate student, the genre that must be replicated has Bitzer's parameters that grow out of academic traditions in their field; thus, to learn what those parameters are, the writer can analyze their writing project's genre requirements by closely noting the structure and other rhetorical elements of recently successful texts.

For Jessica's mentor text's genre analysis, we made note of the overall structure of the proposal, including how titles, subtitles, and other headings were used and the logical progression they made. After we identified the story that the proposal asked for, we broke her information into the same outline. Essentially in her field, her proposal needed to explain (1) whose research she was building on (2) what their research had found (3) what her research

anticipated finding (4) exactly how she would proceed with her experiments and then (5) what her research would mean to future work. Breaking the proposal into chunks helped us then see what rhetorical moves like the order of assertion, evidence, analysis in sections and paragraphs, as well as how to design her document so that graphs and illustrations and photos were visually appealing and informative. Her research was closely aligned with the mentor text and Jessica was keenly aware of potential plagiarism, so part of my coaching duties was ensuring that we only used the mentor text for a guide and cited any information from the document. As we analyzed and discussed her mentor text, Jessica was able to speak about her concerns and ideas and I was able to validate, or occasionally redirect, her process. The mentor text was especially valuable as Jessica says:

> my advisor is very hands-off – sometimes I wish he would be more autocratic and bring out the whip and say do it! But he is hands-off and whenever you get it done you get it done and if you want to meet with me so until then see you at your dissertation.

Working with Jessica was a pleasure because she wanted to be coached and was able to itemize the exact information and assistance that she felt would help her complete her project. The fact that Jessica was ok asking for help and knew how to do it was an advantage. As I noted earlier, some students were hesitant to seek assistance. Many of our sessions focused on outlining the most important elements of the proposal and reading for a logical flow of ideas and argument development, and occasionally document design. To address her citation concerns, we first examined proposals from her field, mentor texts, and determined that APA was not the correct citation system; her department required a different one. I introduced her to MyBib.com

and we used the online platform to successfully assemble her complex bibliography in the appropriate style. We had arranged for a Zoom meeting that we thought would take at least a few hours as many of her sources were incomplete, but together and using MyBib.com, we put her bibliography together in less than forty-five minutes. When we began work on her references, she had 28 complete/partial (some were only titles) citations; three were duplicates that MyBib.com caught before we did. MyBib.com made the process quick and easy and relieved much of the stress of citation style concerns. We both felt relief and triumph after that session! One writing coach affordance is the knowledge a writing expert has not just about writing, but about an assemblage of writing tools of which the student-writer may be unaware.

Before, during, and after working with me, Jessica utilized Graduate School programming like the writing retreats and writing groups when she needed a designated time to write. She also applied for and was admitted to an NEH "group called the Dissertation Institute" which is a writing program outside of UTEP

> for underrepresented students [in my field] and that's a one-week type of writing camp and they showed us techniques like the Pomodoro Technique where they showed us how to write in small chunks in a certain amount of time and they shared with us resources – they gave us the academic writing – something like that. It was a really nice thing to be a part of but as far as what I actually use, I have not really referred to any of it very much. The only thing that I use mostly is that I keep in touch with my writing coach, and I asked her if she would send me a witting outline for order of construction because I wasn't sure with such a large document, I was not sure what order to go in. Do I go in chronological

order? I just write my abstract first and then my hypothesis? and so on and she shared with me a map writing strategy.

The institute offered writing tools that included direct instruction for scientific writing specific to Jessica's field. The most valuable tool to emerge from the program is the NEH writing coach with whom Jessica still occasionally works. Her NEH coach has been able to give her starting points, but, because every engineering department is different, Jessica needed additional writing tools. As she spoke to me about her other coaching experiences, I was able to identify what she valued in a coach and how to best coach her.

My rusty STEM background in Computer Science assisted me in supporting Jessica Watkin's whose project is literally rocket science. I knew just enough of the jargon and math to ask clarifying questions and identify some potential gaps in her research. Jessica and Marian Martinez fast-tracked their PhD by skipping a masters degree and feel like they have gaps in their writing and research experience which makes the PhD process, especially the writing, more daunting, but not impossible. Each makes use of mentor texts and is progressing through their programs with occasional periods of "analysis-paralysis."

After her proposal was accepted and her bid for candidacy approved, Jessica found another tool in the form of internships and a fellowship that will provide her with experience and mentors outside of the university to guide her on her dissertation research and potentially into a career in industry after graduation. Her outside mentors support her experiments with classified materials and are on call for any questions she may have as her research progresses. They do not offer a writing instructional component, but the technical support from these mentors relieves much of the emotional burden Jessica has felt during her degree.

> I feel that it is much more doable! Like, now it is just a matter of connecting with people- like: Remember me and asking about this or that. And yeah- just building relationships with all of them and staying in touch so they can remember me whenever I do need them. I can't believe this is actually available to me! So, I feel like I'm going to be able to get through my PhD. within my timeline. Unless- unless- they want me to maybe take an extra class so I can be familiar with certain things that they do because at the end of the day I'm going to go work for them and they not only want to get me through my PhD, but they want me to fit in a certain position that they have open that they need filled so they are probably – I don't know if it will hold me back and make me have to do more or push me forward because a lot of the things that I'm kind of learning- they can guide me because they already know.

The support of Jessica Watkins' outside mentors has assuaged her concerns about finishing her degree within her anticipated timeline, she feels like she has expert advisors who are willing to work closely with her and guide her research, in addition, knowing that she has a position waiting for her after she graduates alleviates much of her stress and worry about timelines and future employment. Again, her experiences with different coaches and opportunities informed my methods while coaching her writing. As someone who has worked with her for two semesters, I am able to identify her specific challenges and recognize which ones I can help with and let go when she needs a coach for a different aspect of her research. Her team of coaches from her NEH coach to me to her industry mentors, care about her research and will see her successfully complete her PhD and join the ranks of rocket scientists with pride and joy.

Affordance 5: The Coach who Cares

One of my favorite affordances of the peer writing coach model is the friendships the coach and the writer can develop without the power hierarchy of an adviser/student relationship, but with the affective investment in each other's work. I care about each of my participants and proudly call them friends. The women with whom I worked on projects, Nora DeJohn, Jessica Watkins, Bernadette Volkov, and Violet UV, when they reflected on our projects together, spoke of the importance of trust when working with others on their projects. Their research is important to them, academically, professionally, and personally. Very often our sessions involved these intelligent and accomplished participants seeking to fill a knowledge gap; doing so requires some risk-taking as admitting one is lacking knowledge can imply that they are not quite experts, and they may feel the pressure to represent themselves as such. Our one-on-one sessions provided opportunities to address their specific concerns and build safe spaces. As we developed academic friendships, our sessions frequently included emotional supports in addition to feedback on writing and presentations.

Jessica enjoyed a variety of coaching models; however, her NEH coach's physical distance and numerous responsibilities limited Jessica's access to her and the amount of feedback she could provide on documents specific to Jessica's engineering program and her director's specific expectations; they were also unable to develop a deep relationship because of time and geographical restrictions. Her industry mentors are excellent sources for technical aspects of her research but do not offer a writing coach option, nor the social-emotional aspects of a peer writing expert/coach. Jessica is a woman of color who is entering a field where she is a minority in age, gender, and race. Emotional supports are important to her, especially when she feels unsure about any aspect of her scholarly development. We spent time each session talking

about her concerns, both personal and academic, to create a space of safety and trust. She shared her concerns about entering a male-dominated field and excitement when she met mentors that were women in positions of authority who opened their arms to her.

I spent many of our meeting minutes in academic and also social conversations with my other participants as well. Nora DeJohn and I burned through our Zoom sessions with chats about being coaches, mothers, partners, and sometimes a few jokes at the expense of her sources. Our friendships created a safe space for her to voice concerns and know that her voice matters deeply to me. Bernadette and I established by setting aside time each session to talk about her experiences in the PhD program as a returning student. We also talked about teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic and I introduced her to using Google Slides to simulate a live writing classroom as she had never taught online classes and was struggling. When her dog became sick, we had a long conversation about the value of pets to one's well-being, and I followed up with inquiries about the dog's health in subsequent meetings. I was able to address concerns outside of her writing and support other activity systems by listening carefully to her concerns and addressing them by either talking out practical solutions or demonstrating a few tricks of the trade I have picked up in my years as a language teacher. UV Violet and I share a passion for science fiction films and books and had lively pre- and post-academic conversations about which Spock or Dr. Who is best and where her cats hid to escape the children today.

Acknowledging the need for social-emotional support when writing and developing supportive pedagogies is an integral part of what Belli calls RWS's "attention to how emotions can be leveraged to produce better writing, pedagogy, and scholarship is happening in parallel with these efforts to institutionalize well-being in educational contexts" (refer also to Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Aitchison &

Mowbray, 2013; Russell, 2013) Peer writing coaches who care are an affordance to writers who need social and emotional support as well as motivation, guidance, an audience, and a writing pro.

Bad Calls Happen

Although I may have guided Jessica through successful projects and provided some motivation, working with her taught me a humbling lesson about coaching graduate students. At the end of January 2021, Jessica emailed me an application with an editing request. I emailed her a short reply asking her if she wanted me to look at all of it that day. My curt response offended her and bruised her trust. Her attendance in our writing group dropped sharply and it was not until March that she met with me one-on-one to work on another application. I did not show the appropriate respect for her project and for her and I learned that a person who acts as a mentor or writing coach needs to be aware that they are in a position to cause emotional damage to their mentee and to their mentor/mentee relationship because their mentee's work is deeply personal. In a much later conversation, she explained that her feelings had been bruised because asking for help with writing is hard for her and she did not take what she thought was my rejection or belittlement well. Fortunately, after time, my sincere apology, and my persistence in offering my time as a tool for her (and a lot of writing deadlines), I was able to regain her trust, so much so that we could talk about my bad call, and I could learn from my mistake.

As many affordances as the peer writing coach model offer, there are also contradictions that could arise. The coach may, like advisors, have several competing activity systems that reduce their flexibility and their ability to be consistent and they may make human errors that can damage their writers' progress. The further research section Chapter 6, in addition to other considerations, suggests further research on the peer coaching model and proposes ways that a peer coaching model can be implemented.

Put Me in, Coach!

One of my activity systems is coaching a local athletic team. Nothing makes my heart happier than seeing my athletes, and in this research my writers, confidently and eagerly tackle and defeat a tricky opponent, in this study, graduate writing projects. My athletes know they are building healthy habits that (hopefully) will grant them more productive lives and my writers know that their projects will grant them (hopefully) greater opportunities to fulfill their life dreams. During the time we worked together, Jessica wrote and presented her proposal and applied successfully to several programs for fellowships, research opportunities, and internships. To complete her doctoral program, she will write a dissertation, and she knows the writing does not end with her dissertation defense.

> I know writing is not going to end here for me as a scientist and I think that it is very unfortunate that sometimes people are going through this degree plan to prime them for being a scientific researcher but a big part of it is writing and I think it is really sad that we don't have any classes kind of to direct us in scientific writing. It is just something we kind of learn along the way. It's not something that is taught to you, and I feel like it is something that is really necessary. I mean the whole point of doing anything research-wise is to disseminate the information and how are you going to do that without writing?

Jessica is an experienced and accomplished scholar and recognizes that writing when one does not completely understand the expectations of the project can stall the process. She knows writing is important and that writing does not end when she uploads her finalized dissertation to ProQuest. Her experiences with writing have been successful, but far from effortless. She attributes

much of her success to her coaches and we thank her for that credit. The successes Jessica and I shared taught me about the affordances a peer writing coach model can offer for all of the graduate students at UTEP. The peer writing coach model directly addresses many of the barriers Research Question One explores and brings together many of the tools Research Question Two found graduate writers find effective.

Summary

Chapter 5 describes how the peer writing coach model answers Research Question Three through an in-depth look at my work with Jessica Watkins. This coaching model combines the guidance of FST in selecting, centering, and respecting participants, the guidelines of action research in centering and working with participants and utilizes CHAT models to find places of affordance and contradiction to address the need for tools and tool refinement. As an RWS major, English professor, and private/volunteer writing consultant, I found the peer writing coach method the best model to address the requirements of RWS, FST, CHAT, and action research methods, and especially, the needs of my participants.

Five peer writing coach model affordances that emerged from this study include a flexible and yet consistent person who can create a safe space for high/low stakes presentation of ideas, guides and holds the writer accountable for meeting goals, but also understands the situation of the writer and is a knowledgeable writing/language expert who forms academic friendships that support the writer through their projects. The affordances that emerged from the peer writing coaching model can be replicated through the UTEP Writing Center tutors, through the programs hosted by the UTEP Graduate School, and other campus writing tools like the UTEP Library and IRB consultants. Chapter Six will describe detailed ideas formed from this research for the potential development of possible graduate writing activity system tools.

Chapter 6

Key Insights, Ideas for Implementation, and Conclusions

Paulo Freire's (1994) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addresses revolutionary educational ideas meant to not assist struggling people to conform to the structures that may grant their situations less value, but to revolutionize how students and teachers navigate and change the system. The teacher must, to affect "pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word," take actions "*with* the oppressed" and "must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed" (p. 48). The writing experiences of my participants are emotional as well as intellectual and as they shared their writing and lives with me, I found that these women are carrying tremendous responsibilities and it is my duty to honor them appropriately. To be successful in understanding their students, Freire (1994) argues that a teacher or researcher must "be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power, to achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (p. 56). My participants have many contradictions, trials, and troubles; however, their affordances: creativity, determination, and the humility to recognize and find support, mean that they are entirely capable of meeting and exceeding academy standards. The participants in this research are graduate students at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Each has spent time in industry or pursuing other personal paths before returning to the academy.

The interviews and project work revealed that these women would like writing supports that recognize their experience as scholars, clarify doctoral genre expectations, provide a safe space for them to discuss, plan and present their research, guide them through unfamiliar technology, teach them the rhetorical moves that will improve current and future projects, and perform the occasional grammar check. The peer writing coach model that emerged from this

study provides these affordances, but the model may offer implementation challenges for UTEP and other institutions.

My Participants, My People

Women returning to the academy after time away not only need to re-learn/learn academic genres, they also must negotiate the expectations of the academy while balancing their roles and intersections which include being partners, L2+ learners, mothers, grandmothers, employees, women of color, older women, international students, and other identities that can take time and energy away from their educational endeavors. Older, returning women's challenges with writing can exacerbate their other graduate school struggles (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Manthey, 2020; Shapiro, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Starke-Meyerring, 2014; Haas, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014). In addition to conducting eight interviews with women who did not pursue projects, I conducted interviews and spent over 1000 hours working on projects with four women.

Table 4: Hours Spent Working with Project Participants

Project Participant	Total Sessions	Total Hours
Bernadette Volkov	14	200
UV Violet	14	160
Jessica Watkins	17	170
Nora DeJohn	65	700

This study aligns with the research that reports older students returning to school are less likely to graduate and if they do persist, their degree plans often take longer than their peers (Adams et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020; Wollast et al., 2018; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Bosanquet et al., 2014; Russell, 2013; Woldfsberger, 2014; Casanave, 2002; Baker, 1998; Aronson & Swanson, 1991). Brisa Solaris found it "hard when you are older, and you go back because of

the baggage that you have." Mena also found that it was "not easy to come back to school" after time tending to her sick father. Of my participants, she best articulated the challenges of gatekeeping academic practices that many of my participants share with the women of color that Walkington (2017), hooks (2014), Jones et al., (2013) and Kirsch & Royster, (2010) describe; however, I found my participants more likely to seek help to overcome their barriers than the research reflects. These women who are returning after years away from school provide a context which reveals many of the struggles that they face and which they overcome despite overlapping activity systems. I found my participants' experiences provide insights into the graduate writing process that not only create "new knowledge about women" but provide ideas that UTEP and other institutions can utilize in crafting supports that could benefit other subsets of graduate writers (Aronson & Swanson, 1991, p. 162).

Self-Advocacy

Universities across the globe are investing research resources into understanding better the graduate experience and the "graduate education landscape is particularly ripe for innovative models that occupy spaces within and between the commonly adopted mentor/advisor model and the course model" (Pinkert, 2020, p. 40). As employees of the university, professors may be in a position wherein training can be mandated and as subordinates, graduate students are the more vulnerable member of the mentor/mentee relationships; however, after working with my participants and reading research about women graduate writers by women graduate and professorial writers, I recommend UTEP invest in providing educational opportunities that encourage students to self-advocate.

Self-advocacy is an essential component of shifting from a student who is learning to a professional who is an expert in their field. When students learn to articulate the project challenges

they face and then learn to identify possible solutions, they become more independent researchers. They become experts as they learn not just from whom or from where to obtain the information and/or resources they require to create their own solutions, but also as they learn how to professionally approach people with access to the resources they need to address their challenges. As the common mission of all graduate programs is to produce experts in their fields, self-advocacy is essential for every graduate student in every discipline.

Graduate School Orientation

Graduate writers are moving from a student to professional status and part of being a professional is being able to articulate what is needed to someone who can potentially provide resources and/or guidance. Before they begin their course work, all UTEP graduate students attend an orientation hosted by the UTEP Graduate School. Perhaps a portion of future orientations could introduce incoming students to the necessity of self-advocating and model appropriate processes in reflecting on their challenges and articulating what could help them move through their challenge then, with specific and productive language, communicate their requests to professors Self-advocacy tips and materials presented in orientation could be housed on the Graduate School webpage and available at in print at the University Writing Center, in the Graduate School offices and perhaps in the offices of amendable advisors.

The information presenting tips for productive self-advocating could be re-sent out with emails the Graduate School sends when doctoral students achieve candidacy and to masters-level students when they register for their thesis classes. Perhaps the information could be included as part of accountability measures like the already in place Individualized Development Plan (IDP) which guides graduate students in their planning and goal setting to facilitate the completion of their degrees.

Cross-Programmatic Partnerships and Campus-Wide Supports

There are a number of organizations affiliated with UTEP designed to support students socially and academically. For example, Yun Lin's doctoral women's group hosts a monthly meeting wherein professional women present on topics with which Yun Lin knows her peers struggle. In March 2020, I presented on elements of academic writing because Yun Lin's peers had asked for that specific support. Self-advocacy education could merit workshops that could be periodically hosted by the Graduate School in conjunction with the University Writing Center or other professional support organizations affiliated with UTEP.

An Interdisciplinary, Non-Credit, Free Writing Courses

Writing courses for graduate students that centers individual's challenges could be developed through the Graduate School in cooperation with UTEP departments. By combining ideas from other institutions on graduate-level interdisciplinary writing course, like those offered by Rutgers University, and ideas that reflect my participants' preferences, here I propose some ideas for a potential interdisciplinary graduate writing course.

The hypothetical writing course would be offered as an interdisciplinary graduate writing course whose UTEP catalogue entry would describe the course as a professionalization course or seminar, not as a remedial course. It would be a pass/fail one credit course and would appear on transcripts. If feasible, the course would be free, or possibly provided at a reduced tuition rate. With individual department agreement, this course could fulfill the professionalization seminar requirements of many UTEP Ph.D. and master's students.

The class, ideally, would not have more than 25 students. The class would be populated as professors recommend students to apply for the course or students apply on their own initiative. Requiring an advisor's endorsement may create accountability features that positively affect the

motivation of the students. The students would apply to be in the class and in their application, describe their writing project(s) and the challenges they may be having with project(s) they are working on which could include proposals, articles, theses, dissertation chapters, etc. and what supports they would like to receive. The course could be designed around the needs the applicants describe. The hosting and rotating professors could then prepare a syllabus specific to the genres and challenges of the students in the class.

Ideally, the duration of the course would be one semester and meet once a week. Professors from any discipline who would like to be part of a writing program could, with department dispensation, be allowed to count teaching this graduate writing class as part of their mandatory course loads. One professor would guide the class for a semester and be supported by additional professors who could rotate the days they attend the classes to support the lead professor. The lead professor would direct the weekly class activities while the support professors could assist by teaching minilessons that focus individual's writing concerns or workshops that address students' concerns or work with small groups within the class in a writing group model.

The classes could follow a format that began with the lead or supporting professor's focused lesson on a writing concern topic with a question/answer and discussion session. Students could report on how well they met their writing goals, and the class could take time to celebrate successes and motivate those struggling to meet their goals (Wolfsberger, 2014). The classes could also include elements of peer review and individual professorial attention. Each weekly class would conclude with students setting and sharing their goals for the next week.

Focused, Graduate-Level Peer Support at The University Writing Center

The UTEP University Writing Center (UWC) offers, as of Summer 2021, synchronous online tutoring options and options that allow students to email a paper to a consultant who will

return the paper with editing ideas “within 72 business hours” (University of Texas at El Paso Writing Center, 2021) and face-to-face sessions are also available. The tutors at the UWC offer

- Essay Organization
- Genre and Audience Analysis
- Writing and Revision Strategies
- MLA, APA and Chicago Documentation Instruction
- The Creative Collaboratorium Group Work Space
- Workshops
- Faculty Services

(University of Texas at El Paso Writing Center, 2021)

Most of the tutors at the Writing Center are experienced undergraduate and beginning graduate students who are trained in organization, genre, and audience analysis, writing and revision strategies, documentation instruction, and province workshops that center different writing tasks from resumes to accessing library resources (The University of Texas at El Paso Writing Center). Many of my participants utilized the services of the UTEP Writing Center with varying degrees of success. Nora submitted work to the UTEP Writing Center and found the graduate tutor helpful but did not trust the advice of the undergraduate tutors. Yun Lin hoped that the Writing Center critique would prepare her article for a journal editor; she was disappointed when the editor’s critique was much harsher than the writing consultant’s response. Maria attended a Resume Clinic hosted by the UTEP Writing Center, and while the clinic was useful, she feels the tutors there cannot help her with the “setting it up” of her work. Catherine Acosta was disappointed in the surface-level edits for her graduate-level paper; Jessica appreciated the tutor’s time, but her tutor gave her incorrect citation information for her IEEE engineering writing project.

Yun Lin still uses the Writing Center as an initial check, but none of my other participants actively utilize the Writing Center as a consistent writing tool.

Mentor Text Repository

In cooperation with the Graduate School, the UWC could collect examples of successful projects written by UTEP graduate students from across the STEM and humanities disciplines. Permission would need to be secured from both the author(s) of the project and their advisors. If permission could be received with a provision of redaction of sensitive information, the censored text would still provide information about the genre expectations and lend to a genre analysis or corpse study. The theses, articles, proposals, literature reviews, etc. could be housed digitally with open access for UTEP students or held in reserve for only graduate tutors' access when actively guiding a graduate tutee. These texts could provide instructional material for genre and corpse study modules for potential UWC tutors.

Genre and Corpse Study Modules for Graduate Tutors

If the UWC were to house a repository for mentor texts gleaned from willing graduate students and their mentors, these texts could be used to guide potential graduate tutors to a more specific understanding of how different UTEP disciplines assemble their salient writing projects. A module that surveys proposals, articles, theses, and dissertations for the various disciplines UTEP hosts could help tutors gain experience in identifying the structures, language expectations, and rhetorical maneuvers of these writing projects in addition to being able to take apart and explain journal articles, literature reviews, and other professional communication like resumes, *curricula vita*, cover letters, etc. A corpse study could be included and guide potential tutors into

understanding the specific phrases of a discipline that create insider-academic tones and move the graduate writer's diction into the context/jargon of conversations in their field. In addition, a training in the different citation styles different disciplines use would also guide tutors in answering graduate writers' questions about which citation system they are expected to use in what projects.

Broad Citation Training

While a potentially cumbersome undertaking, in addition to and as part of learning genre studies and corpse studies, potential graduate tutors could learn how to evaluate a text for the citation system it uses and where instructional supports can be located for a wider array than MLA, APA, and Chicago citation options. There are numerous citation styles; however, sites like Mybib.com can simplify the citation process with access to over 50 different styles (MyBib.com, 2018). The UTEP Library offers support for RefWorks. Perhaps part of the tutor training could include teaching tutors how to guide tutees to a broad range of recourses (online platforms, the librarians) that address their concerns with citations.

Consistent Graduate Tutors

There are graduate level tutors at the UTEP University Writing Center with knowledge of graduate-level writing expectations. Perhaps each graduate tutor could be assigned disciplines of focus. Their training in genre, corpse, and citations could center those fields' expectations and graduate writers seeking assistance could be directed either via the UWC's website, or through the graduates' advisors who could have the tutor's contact information. The graduate tutor could hold office hours that work with their schedule, but also offer asynchronous support. Graduate students could be presented with information about the graduate tutors with suggestions that when a

graduate writer has found a gradate tutor with whom they work well, they could inquire as to the tutor's hours, making it possible for the graduate writer to visit a consistent tutor.

Writing Programs (Retreats, Studios, Camps)

The Graduate School invests heavily into efforts to make their programs accessible and user-friendly and supportive of peer-collaborations. The following suggestions are for augmentation and are meant to be supportive, not critical of the UTEP Graduate School and their programs. The logistics of program design are beyond the scope of this study; however, I offer the following thoughts.

Access

As part of the writing support programs' application process, applicants could be encouraged to invite a buddy and provided a link that would allow them to send a fill-in-the-blank invitation to a peer. They could provide the name and email address of the peer and the Graduate School could generate a personalized invitation with a link to the application that might encourage the person to join or reach out to their peer for more information.

If the Graduate School is able to collaborate with the childcare center located on campus, perhaps a link and plain-text details and instructions for applying to for the daycare option could be provided as part of the application for the writing program.

An online writing support option could be offered concurrently with in-person writing programs. One of the facilitators of the writing program could be tasked with monitoring the online participants while the other monitored the in-person group. The groups could be combined for the initial welcome, introductions, any writing instruction, and. The groups could then diverge, and the in-person participants could be partnered to discuss their projects and set their goals while the on-line participants utilized breakout groups to do the same. The in-person groups could meet

momentarily for any mindfulness practices presentations then begin their individual writing. The on-line group could follow the same model before beginning their individual writing. At the end of the retreat, studio, or camp, the online and physical groups could be combined to share out before leaving.

A post-writing program support that could build on the momentum of the writing retreats, studios, and camps could manifest in the form of an online platform that allows participants to continue setting, recording, and then reporting back writing goals between and beyond writing programs; thus, facilitate the project of students who thrive on setting and meeting goals, but do not necessarily need or want feedback on their writing.

Instruction

The application for Graduate School writing retreats, studios, and camps could include questions that address writers' specific writing concerns. The questions could include instructions that assure the student the information is only being collected to inform potential instruction. The directions could also ask L2+ students to identify specific struggles they or peers have with academic English. As of the writing of this report (Summer 2021), the Graduate School has added questions to the application that ask for this information.

An online, anonymous repository for professors could be created to collect advisors' feedback on writing gaps they experience with their graduate students. Based on the information collected from professors, the Graduate School could commission modules that provide corrective instruction to be presented in writing programs and housed on their website for all graduate writers to access. Emails inviting professors to contribute and graduate students to apply for writing programs could include links to the modules.

An additional writing program support could be direct instruction that answers the information gleaned from applications and professor feedback. A volunteer professor or graduate student specializing in writing could create a presentation with Question/Answer session that incorporates the most mentioned concerns. This presentation could be recorded and housed as part of the previously suggested writing module collection. A writing expert, either a professor or graduate student, could be available to both online and in-person participants for the duration of the writing program to address individual writing questions.

Extending the hours of any writing program will cost in terms of financial, faculty, and space resources. Perhaps, to mitigate costs, but to extend availability, online writing camps/retreats could be hosted by the Graduate School during hours more conducive to students with responsibilities like jobs and children. These programs could be shortened to 2-4 hours instead of a full retreat and offered in evenings. The focus could be on making instructive modules available, not necessarily performed, and on accountability supports like goal setting and reporting progress.

Another ambitious suggestion is to create completely asynchronous writing support that focuses on accountability supports with peer-feedback options, access to writing support modules, and a writing expert available for individual questions, concerns, and spot editing. This platform could mimic social media in that each writer would have a profile that includes information they would like to share about their research and writing projects and cursory information about their lives outside of their studies. The platform could host a public forum that allows each writer to post their writing goals at the beginning of the week and report their successes at the end. The platform would allow other participants to make encouraging comments regarding goals. The Graduate School could issue weekly digital badges, celebratory comments, or encouraging statements to writers who report their progress (or lack thereof) and send encouraging form emails

to participants who do not report at the end of the week. There could also be a Question-and-Answer space for participants to crowd-source answers about navigating their programs and writing projects. Participants could be given options to join digital collaborations to exchange writing for peer-feedback. In collaboration with the University Writing Center, the platform could supply a link to the UWC for participants to submit parts of their writing to tutors. This platform would necessitate a digital technology expert and Graduate School monitors to ensure propriety and eliminate negative intrusions.

Socialization and Peer Mentoring

UTEP Writing Retreats introduce graduate writers from various disciplines and of a wide range of experience. Supports that build on the Graduate School in-place programs could include supports for peers that seem to work well together in writing retreats. The UTEP Library has space dedicated to group meetings and as COVID-19 precautions are removed, perhaps as part of writing programs and as information on the Graduate School website, directions for signing up for spaces could be provided. The Graduate School could also provide information about other spaces on campus conducive for group meetings and perhaps design writing programs that center groups meeting. A group Writing Retreat could mimic current individual-attendees retreats in format but cater towards groups in conversation. The application for attendance could include questions that gather information about what elements (space, time, snacks, daycare) facilitate cohesive groups to inform Graduate School Writing Group programs.

A further ambitious suggestion is that the Graduate School research the professional organizations affiliated with the UTEP and provide information and access points for these organizations to attendees of various writing programs and on the Graduate School website.

Writing Groups

Writing groups are powerful tools in that they give graduate writers, especially marginalized people, "a space where the insider outsider position is legitimized and valued, where stances flourish, where a new vision of academic community is possible (Aronson & Swanson, 1991, p. 160). The UTEP Graduate School offers a Graduate Writing Group platform. The application process asks questions about preferences in meeting times, personal preferences in purpose of a group, and gives options to applicants to choose from a variety of writing group formats. I joined one of these groups in Fall 2020 and met with the group for the duration of the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. Once the application was processed and people assigned to the group, we did not receive follow up from the Graduate School. A follow up or check in with the Graduate School could act as an accountability factor that might sustain the writing groups by suppling a nonthreatening authoritative gaze.

Space

A tool for writing groups could take a physical/online hybrid approach. Physical supports could include providing space, or access to signing up for space, at UTEP. The Graduate School could house information about available spaces for groups meetings including the group rooms at the library and the interdisciplinary Research Building and any other spaces the university designates for group meetings, including how groups reserve the areas and possibly links to the reservation sites. Another idea is to host writing retreats for writing groups, including if not especially the Graduate School formed writing groups. The retreats could follow the format currently in place for individual programs, but perhaps have the groups talk among themselves to set goals together before breaking to write as individuals. Instruction about writing could be provided, as well as tips for productive writing groups. The individual ending reporting out could

be with their groups and then a representative of the group could talk about challenges and success the group are experiencing. The Graduate School could follow up with surveys about the retreat that also glean information about the cohesion of the group and provide instruction/mediation/etc. for the groups. This writing group retreats could be offered either as a separate venue online, or these hypothetical writing retreats could support a hybrid option with members of groups attending virtually.

Leadership and Accountability

The Graduate School could offer an element of leadership combined with accountability wherein writing groups both affiliated with the Graduate School and others affiliated with UTEP could register with the Graduate School to receive support. Supports could include emails from the Graduate School with tips for creating a cohesive and productive group and suggestions for group purposes from feedback groups to pure accountability to just social groups. The Graduate School could also host a website where groups report weekly or bi-weekly on their meetings with a range of reporting options from just reporting that they met to reporting challenges/successes. The Graduate School could send congratulatory emails with digital badges or other virtual kudos to individuals in groups that report successes.

Time and Flexibility

As part of the above website, the Graduate School could offer space for asynchronous writing groups that would register as a group and receive the emails of encouragement and education. The website could have private platforms for group members to communicate and exchange work for peer review. The Graduate school could offer online groups time through asynchronous (but with synchronous options) interactions and flexibility through providing

suggestions for formats like feedback, presentations audience, accountability, writing education focused groups, or various combinations of the proceeding.

Feedback and/or Audience and Social Aspects

As part of writing group education, the Graduate School, perhaps in collaboration with the UWC and the RWS program, could create modules with suggestions and guidelines for giving and receiving feedback that address both technical and emotional aspects of giving and receiving critiques. The educational modules could also encourage students, especially nontraditional, to utilize writing groups as professional socialization by articulating how working with peers acculturates students into a professional world by providing a place to practice being an expert. These modules could come from and be used for writing retreats for groups and housed on the Graduate School website. To address a social aspect, the Graduate School could utilize their contact information/records of groups and if an individual would like to depart from one group for whatever reason, the Graduate School could guide them to either forming their own group or joining an existing one.

As flexibility is the key to successful writing groups, perhaps the Graduate School could host a writing group that meets once a month wherein graduate students who need to practice a presentation like a dissertation/thesis proposal or defense, or even STEM update presentations could have a space to perform and received feedback in a nonthreatening environment.

Recruitment

The Graduate School writing programs could be used to showcase the hypothetical supports described above. People who are interested could join groups already in existence or use the Graduate School resources to create their own group with people they work well with, possibly people they meet in the writing programs. The Graduate School's website techs or other personnel

could present the writing group options and other digital/physical resources for groups at the end of writing retreats to capitalize on any relationships that exist or are forming that could become productive writing groups.

Writing Coaches

The definition of writing coach differs; for this study, a writing coach is an individual that works one-on-one with a graduate student on writing projects throughout the duration of their writing project(s). The peer writing coach model that emerged from this study fits the preceding definition and includes instructional, emotional, and social tools. The most ubiquitous form of the writing coach is the graduate student's advisor; however, advisors often do not have the resources to address the extent of their students' needs (Holmes et al., 2018; Summers, 2016; Tauber, 2016; Pinker, 2014; Gernatt & Coberly-Holt, 2014; Bair & Mader, 2013; Ondrusek, 2012; Aitchison, 2009; Moxley, 2001; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Professional writing coaches guide and support the graduate student in a variety of ways including brainstorming, organizing, structuring, editing, formatting, etc. They are often paid for their services (Tauber, 2016).

The UTEP campus does not house writing coaches as defined in this study; however, there are individuals in departments and programs that offer specialized assistance with specific aspects of writing tasks. The research librarians will assist students in locating articles and navigating academic research search engines, offer workshops on research software, and support citation management systems (University of Texas at El Paso Library, 2021). The Office of Research and Sponsored Projects has administrators that will guide graduate student through the IRB process (University of Texas at El Paso Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 2021). These departments and others are often invited to present for graduate courses by instructors who wish to make their students aware of on-campus resources.

The Dream

In a perfect world with endless funding, graduate schools at every university could hire several professional graduate writing coaches to work with willing graduate students. The coaches could provide feedback, instruction, mentoring, and socialization; thus, taking some of the burdens from advisors and giving graduate students an additional invaluable resource. As graduate coaching requires intense involvement with individual graduate writers, each coach could be expected to work with between 10 and 15 students. The student and coach would create a contract that detailed the expectations for each party within the university's guidelines. The coach would work with the graduate student until the student no longer wished the support or graduated. The coaching position would be a full-time position and could entail teaching a writing course (possibly the one outlined in this project), working with graduate writers who do not request a coach but do utilize the University Writing Center, and possibly working with faculty on grants and publications.

The More Practical Approach

Instead of hiring full-time professional writing coaches, graduate students in RWS (or from other fields but with training in RWS pedagogy), once they have become doctoral candidates, could be offered positions that are similar to professional writing coaches. They would undergo training outlined in this study for Writing Center consultants as well as modules in working with graduate students and advisors. Instead of teaching undergraduate writing classes, they could be assigned between 4 and 6 graduate students with whom they would work with on projects for the duration of their degree or the duration of the graduate's project, whichever finished first. If the student had been working with a peer writing coach that graduated, moved on, or needed to change coaches, the previous coach could brief the incoming coach on their writers' situations. The RWS

experts in genre analysis could assist graduate writers with questions about their projects; they can also help with citation systems, language issues, and be a social support as well.

Future Research

Global economic demands have changed the demographic of the graduate student to include increased populations of working-class, international, underrepresented minorities, more female students, and combinations of the preceding which means more research is needed to understand the writing support needs of a diverse graduate student body (Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Caplan, 2020; Douglas, 2020; Aitchison & Guerin, 2014b; Jones et al., 2013; Russell, 2013; Ali & Coate, 2012; Aitchison et al., 2010a; Kirsch, 1993). The peer writing coach model emerged as a viable model that addresses a range of graduate writers' challenges; however, the model needs further investigation to determine how universities could financially and logistically implement the model. As the peer writing coach is in a position of emotionally supporting others, trainings that help coaches recognize and address their own limitations and when they need to contact a professional health care giver would provide support for potential peer writing coaches. Research centering the peer writing coach could also develop pedagogies for one-on-one graduate-specific mentoring and study the effectiveness of the model in marginalized populations.

The research that needs to be conducted to implement the suggested graduate writing supports is beyond the scope of this study but could be addressed in future research designed to address the specific needs of UTEP writers. Research that centers the experiences of marginalized writers could better inform the design of future writing supports that address the complications of standpoint and could support the entire graduate student body. Research that centers the experience of advisors could also inform the design of graduate supports that relieve advisors of some of the pressures of working with graduate students without detracting from their authority as advisors.

This study also recommends further research into Other'ed people's experiences with their advisors and the implications of diversity in hiring practices. In order to find ways to utilize writing camps and retreats as recruitment tools for viable writing groups, research that experiments with writing programs and follows writing groups form from writing camps/retreats could inform effective practices. Research into viable methods of graduate writing instruction that utilizes courses, tutors/coaches, writing centers, and writing groups and combinations of the above could be conducted to inform campus-specific supports.

Conclusions

The mediating artifact not only amplifies, it opens up new possibilities that lead to surprises

-Engeström, 2005, p. 47

Yes, We Can

Studying the complex activity systems of women who are returning to the academy after years, sometimes many years, away has given me insight into challenges of graduate writing that transcend discipline. My participants struggled emotionally, financially, academically, and with trying to balance their many responsibilities. When they struggled, they found/created ways to move through their challenges. Graduate students tend to be independent and creative learners and, if motivated, will find the resources they need to progress (Fredrick et al., 2020; Kim & Wolke, 2020; Walkington, 2017; Tauber, 2016; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murry, 2014).

Graduate students can be taught, they can learn, and they can be taught to learn to be autodidactic and self-advocating. It is the graduate student's "responsibility to take control of their own education" and the graduate advisor/professor/mentor's "responsibility to create an environment that facilitates student control" (Fredrick et al., p. 161). Even if the university did not provide supports, graduate students "who want to write find other spaces to do so" and when they

"discover how much or how little their supervisors are willing to talk about the entire thesis writing process" the graduate student "can create these other spaces to discuss writing and other spaces to do their writing" (Murry, 2014, p. 106) that suit their preferences.

Yes, Tools Help!

Graduate writers tend to be intelligent and accomplished scholars; writing supports that are demeaning or condescending are more likely to stall than facilitate their progress. They do not need, as Muktaa said, supports that "act like some kind of savior." Respect and trust are key to honoring all graduate writers and their journey. Setbacks and perceived failures can demotivate and demoralize even the most motivated graduate writers. Effective supports that create opportunities for success can help students persist because successes motivate; even incremental successes are steps towards the writers' objects which very often are steps towards access to careers that have long been dreams. Graduate students of all demographics often have hopes, dreams, and futures attached to graduation which can make the process fraught with high-risk ventures and emotional breakdowns. The supports my participants would like could be addressed by UTEP and the suggestions in this chapter are based on research and my experiences with these women. The most salient conclusion of this study is that graduate students are capable, motivated people who would like to be, and deserve to be treated with respect. Part of that respect is providing supports that will answer their questions, and part of that respect includes giving them space to self-advocate and search for solutions to their problems.

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Vita

Jennifer Louise Wilhite earned her associates in English from Brigham University at Idaho, formally Ricks College, in 1996; she earned her bachelor's degree in English from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2006, her and a master's degree in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2018. She began her doctoral program in 2018 at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Since 2006, Jennifer has taught all levels of high school English beginning at Naaman Forrest High School in Garland, Texas. Since her move to El Paso, she has taught at Chapin High School, Coronado High School, and currently teaches Dual Credit English at Burges High School and online classes for El Paso Community College. Her intentions are to continue focusing on teaching pedagogies at the secondary and college levels through the Texas Dual Credit program, teaching at community colleges, and continuing to work with graduate writers.

Jennifer's dissertation, "Rewriting the Graduate Experience: A Study of the Writing Experiences of University of Texas at El Paso Graduate Students across Disciplines" was magnanimously supervised by Dr. Lucía Durá.

Jwilhite@episd.org

This dissertation was typed by Jennifer Wilhite